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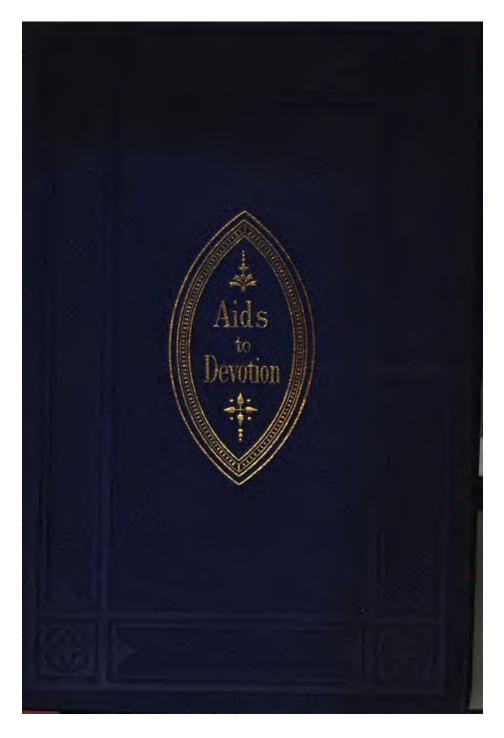
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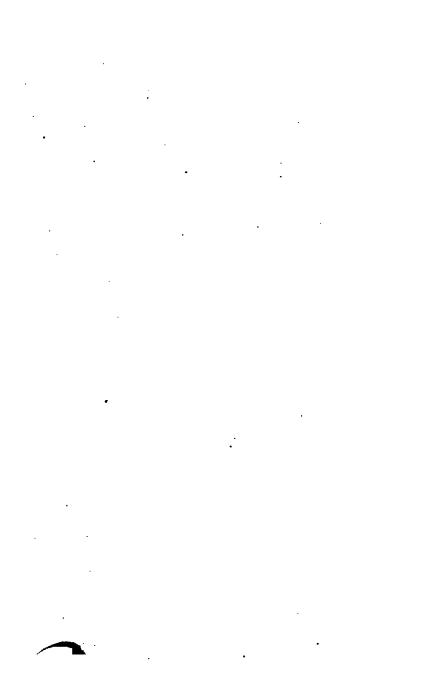
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AIDS TO DEVOTION.

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AIDS TO DEVOTION;

or,

Religions Rendings

IN THE ORDER OF THE NATURAL AND THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

BY

GOODWYN BARMBY.

LONDON:

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AIDS TO DEVOTION.

Part First.

IN THE ORDER OF THE NATURAL YEAR.

L—THE MORNING OF MORNINGS.

of a new year. All meditations that are fitted for the morning of a new day are especially fitted for the morning of a new year. First and above all, we have to awake to righteousness and sin not. We have to be holy as God is holy, and merciful as He is merciful. Let us begin the year with this thought. Let us start upon our spiritual course with the highest reverence for the Divine perfections, with the most earnest desire of imitating them. Let us base all our devotion to God upon the recognition of His moral excellence. Be it ours, then, to feel, to determine, to arrange, that we will execute justice on



this first morning of the new year; that we will be better imitators of God; that we will be truer followers Be it ours to order, to forecast, to plan, of Christ. such a course of devotion, such an arrangement of action, as may lead us best to carry out that self-culture and self-discipline which are essential to the formation of a noble character here and to the development of a heavenly character hereafter. although we know not what the events of the opening year may bring to us,-how we may be tried by prosperity or benefitted by adversity, --- whether the divinity will come to us in a gloomy cloud of ills or in a golden shower of blessings,-what may be our fates or fortunes,—let us seek and determine to possess that preparedness of mind which shall arm us for every event and enable us to bear and forbear, to labour and not to faint, to be true verbs-real words of Godactive and passive, ready to be, to do or to suffer, prepared alike for ill or for good, for the events of time or for those of eternity, for death or for heaven.

In this dawn of a new year of life, let us determine to do that which is right, to take God for our Father, to love Christ as our Brother, to pray for the Holy Spirit that it may become the Spirit of Holiness in our own souls; let us resolve to follow holy examples, to become ourselves sincere and earnest and holy livers; let us decide with the force of our whole wills to do nothing in the future that is mean, or gross, or false, or cruel, or cowardly, or degrading, but to strive after all that is elevating and kind and pure, and to take our part upon the side of Justice and Benevolence, of Charity and Temperance, of Knowledge, Truth and Freedom.

And so may we determine and do upon this morning of mornings, that it may become a really new era in our lives. And may this new year be to us what God wishes it, and throughout it may we be resigned to His will. Sufficient ever for the day is the evil thereof, and in His hands we leave our future destinies, who controls all things wisely and well, assured that we trust them to the care of a merciful and compassionate Father. And be this the utterance of our devotion, the voice of our spirit, upon this morning of a new year. To Thee, O God, we confide ourselves and all who are most dear to us. Under the shadow of Thy wings, although the world be abroad in arms against us, will we repose in peace and trust, in rest and quiet-Although darkness and distress be around us, we trust in Him who bringeth the white moon from beneath the grey cloud, who causeth the bright sun to arise in the dim east. In Thy name will we go forth to love and execute Thy justice in this new morning of another year of our lives. To Thee, O God, do we commend the new year now opening for us. Accept this our psalm of trust and confidence in Thee, and to Thee be glory for ever and ever.

II.—NEW-YEAR'S MORNING.

NOW pure and compassionate should be our thoughts! how benevolent our resolutions! what a course of justice and mercy, of rectitude and beneficence, should we place before our souls upon the dawn of another annual era of time, amid the dim and grey and clouded morning of a new year: the rising sun of which will look upon we do not know what scenes, what struggles, what defeats, what victories, what chequered surfaces of light and shadow: the setting sun of which will gleam upon we cannot tell what destinies, what mourners, what graves, what gathering darkness, now mercifully hidden from our view! The bud of joy which has suddenly to burst upon us is, like the blight of desolation, unseen amid the leaves: kindly concealed from our eyes, by the Father who is in heaven, that the joy may be greater and the desolation less.

And this beautiful name which the Lord Jesus gave to the good God, "Our Father who is in heaven," should remind us that He has directed us to become perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect, to take God as the type of all excellence, as Jesus himself did; and to endeavour in every way to obtain a knowledge of His will, and to perform it after that way which Christ himself shewed us. And hence comes the expression that Christ is the Way. The way to do different things is such and such. The way to God is to live like Christ, and Christ's life was a constant prayer, a perpetual endeavour to become perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect.

We cannot too early in the year or in the day take this course. O that we may thus possess quickness of conscience, readiness to do that which is right, preparedness for duty, alacrity to put on the whole armour of God! Although in the evening we may not hold our hand, in the morning we should sow our seed. We should not wait till the broad blaze of noon makes us languid and weak in effort, or till the dusk shadows of evening hide the scene of labour from our eyes; but we should be up and doing when the heavenly morning rose in the eastern skies is unfolding its crimson petals and opening its bloom of loveliness; when the mist steams from the mould, and the dew-beads shine with a changeful diamond light from the tip of each graceful spray. And so with spiritual labours as with industrial works. What is to be done should be begun early. There should be no time lost in doing that which ought to be done.

We should begin each period of our lives by calling ourselves to judgment, by bringing our own characters before the assize of our souls. Doing justice to others, or, in different words, judging them charitably, should be part of our new-year's morning work; but our foremost duty is to judge ourselves severely, to thoroughly condemn any wrong we find within ourselves, to give no quarter to our sins, to look at our own shortcomings conscientiously, and to discipline our souls sternly. Self-culture, Self-discipline, are the two staves, the beauty and bands of the old prophet, which are in the hands of the shepherd Conscience when he feeds Self-culture, Self-discipline, are his spiritual flock. the hour and minute hands of the clock, which ever reminds us of the right employment of time. culture, Self-discipline, are the two main pillars on which must be reared the edifice of character, and that edifice should be at once an honest market-place for this life, and a holy temple fitting us for the life to come.

And Self-culture, Self-discipline, will lead us to look before us, as well as behind us,—to determine for the coming day or the new year, as well as to recapitulate or review our faults of commission or omission in the past. And here, yet further, we have to place the use of forecasting, the value of arrangement, the utility of the faculty of order, the duty of planning. Forecasting, resolution, will—order, plan, method—

should all be brought into play. The mind to conceive must take precedence of the will to execute and of the power to perform. When a good plan of action is firmly fixed in the mind, the work is half accomplished. We should endeavour to establish the principle of order amid our duties, to employ method in the distribution of our time, to forecast the arrangements and responsibilities of the day and of the year. By commencing this course with the dawn of the new year, the formation of character will be accelerated, and all that is gained in force will be stamped with permanence.

III.—THE STRENGTH OF OUR DAYS.

SUR contemplation of the advent of each new year should be attended by the acknowledgment that our life and strength are derived from God. Not only as our days are numbered, but as our days are characterized, shall our strength be, if we will but seek it from God. Not only through so many days of time, but through so many days of eventuality, will God thus support us. Not only through so many sunny days, but through so many cloudy days, and through the dark, sweeping, surrounding billows of night also. There are days of temptation and days of trial. There are days of adversity, in which we are in danger from the tempestbolts falling around us; and there are days of prosperity, no less dangerous for some, in which all good qualities of spirit are exposed to the scorching and parching sun-blaze. There are days of affliction, in which our couch may be our altar, and our pains prove sacraments; and there are days of activity, in which, unless we well guard our souls, the business affairs of this life may so absorb them that they may become neglectful or even unmindful of the things of eternity. For all these days the strength to be sought must come from God. To Him we must go in the day of darkness as in the day of light, in that of joy as in that of sorrow, in that of success as in that of temptation, if we would have fulfilled to us the promise, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Great examples have we thus for our encouragement, in contemplating the steps that have been trod by others before us—

Footprints that perhaps another, Sailing o'er life's solemn main, A forlorn and shipwrecked brother, Seeing may take heart again!"

Remember how Moses, Joshua, Gideon and all the Old-Testament heroes, were strengthened by God in the days of their trials, afflictions, persecutions and warfare. Recollect that when Elijah mourned that the altars of Jehovah were thrown down and he alone was left to serve Him, the Lord comforted him by declaring that there were four thousand men in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Prophets and apostles have thus out of weakness been made strong, and from the day of small things the day of great events has had its birth. And reformers like Luther and Knox, and teachers like Socinus and Reuchlin, and martyrs like Huss and Servetus, have stood alone

against masses, have had their foreheads made strong as iron to effect their purposes, have had courage given them to endure unto the end, and conquered when dying amid the flames. And all these lawgivers and leaders, judges and prophets, apostles and reformers, confessors and martyrs, who have thus found strength in the days of their trouble, but preceded or followed the example of our great human Head, Christ Jesus, who in the day of his temptation was strengthened to resist the adversary, who in the day of his trial was enabled to bear witness of the truth, and who in the agony of his passion, when even he had exclaimed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" was yet strengthened to add, "Yet not my will, but Thine, be done."

Encouraged by these great examples, may we also go to the Giver of all power and might, and we shall find that as our days so shall our strength be.

With the new year, what good deeds do we purpose to do? There are many that require to be done. There are plenty that may be easily supposed for us to choose among. Let us make our own choice, but when it is made let us not hesitate to be true to it. In putting our hand to the plough, let us not turn back and prove ourselves unworthy of the kingdom of God. If we are to go to war, let us count the cost of it before we set forth, and that not in a one-sided way; but while we reckon up the gain to trade from the

unblockaded sea-board, not forget the increase in the expenditure of army and navy and the taxation necessary to meet it, nor the thousands of poor things whose dear lives would be suddenly wrested from them, and whose immortal souls would be sent unprepared to meet their God. Sufficient for the day is ever the evil thereof; but if we will go to God, He will give us strength to bear it. And thus with what we purpose to do. Let us do our daily work, the work which is nearest at hand, in full trust that it will be for the best. Let us do the right thing and leave the rest to God, and He will provide. Let us desire to do that which is good, true, pure, just, merciful; and God will answer this our prayer to Him, and strengthen our wills to effect that which we undertake. do all things as in the sight of God, and with reference to Him; and obscure things will be made clear; and rough things, even; and difficult things, plain; and hard things, easy; and in His light we shall see light. and find that as the day of our work and effort, so shall our strength be.

IV.—THE WORSHIP OF SILENCE.



REALLY good and true activity is the best sign of healthy life. There is, however, such a thing as unhealthy action for the soul as well

as body. There is the pulse too quick; the systole and diastole of the heart too rapidly alternating. There is that feverish proselytism which makes its converts worse than they were before. Healthy action, inward or outward, should never be despised. As manual labour increases the muscular force of the arm, so does benevolent agency increase the spiritual powers of the Yet the declaration of the poet is at the same time true, that they also serve who only stand and Martha was right in being busy about her wait. household work, but not in being troubled with much serving, much less in finding fault with her sister Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus. There is a time for contemplation as well as for industry. There are periods that might be well used for meditation and self-examination, as well as employed in prayer and praise.

There is no more solemn affair in which souls can

be engaged than in the worship of God. It should not be entered upon unadvisedly or unpremeditatedly. How best to bring the human soul into communion with the Divine Spirit?—that assuredly is a momentous question. Should we go before God in haste? Should we seek the Almighty in thoughtlessness? Are words the best means through which to communicate with God? Certainly not such as are hastily uttered, or the import of which is not deeply felt in the soul, while they are being expressed by the tongue. is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few." The heathen, said Jesus, think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be ye not like to them. We can pray without the use of words. God does not require our words to enable Him to understand our wants. He hears the inarticulate cry of the soul in the secrecy of the still chamber as well as the sonorous anthem of the cathedral choir. prayer of words, however, may be a most beneficial means to ourselves. By endeavouring thus to express our deficiencies to God, they may become clearer to By striving to make known our wants to Him, they will be realized more fully to our own souls. Words of prayer are wanted for ourselves, although not needed by God. But how much more worshipfully will flow these words after we have contemplated the glorious attributes of God, after we have meditated upon the infinite extent of His goodness and mercy!

Yet how can we commence contemplating these except in a state of profound awe and silent adoration? And how can we conduct such a course of meditation except in the stillness of the soul's sanctuary? He of whom His psalmist sung, "Serve the Lord with gladness and come before His presence with a song," is well represented as declaring also, "Keep silence before O that the sounds of their contenme, all lands." tion, their party-cries and war-whoops and tones of discord might cease! And He who speaks to the noisy nations, "Keep silence before me, all lands," declares likewise to the troubled soul, "Be still, and know that I am the Lord!" O that thus in the stillness of our souls we may know and acknowledge God to be our Lord!

A church to be catholic in its devotional life as in its general spirit, must incorporate and develop within itself all characters of worship, all phases of divine service, all forms of ritual, which have been originated in each of the separate branches of the general church; inasmuch as each must have been an expression of devotion from the human soul, and each have answered to its special need at some particular period of its religious growth or upward development. And thus there should be silent worship as well as vocal worship. And as private worship is the fitting prelude to public prayer and praise, so is silent devotion the proper preparation for private worship, and will yield

it inspiration and contribute to its force. O let us try for ourselves how greatly it will effect this, and we shall find that our strength is in stillness! Let us sit still and review in our minds the wonderful works of God, and we shall better arise and praise Him. Let us sit still and strive to contemplate God in the central galaxy of His glory in His heaven of heavens, in His highest altitude of power and goodness, and we shall more efficiently humble ourselves before Him. Let us sit still and meditate upon His remembered mercies and long-suffering patience and tender compassion and fatherly forgiveness, and we shall fall upon our knees in prayer and pour out our hearts before Him with a fulness of trust and love which we otherwise could The worship of silence supplies inspiranot possess. tion and yields time for the true articulation of the soul. Thus let us worship the Lord our God.

V.—DIVINE WORK.

OD the Creator neither slumbereth nor sleepeth. Creation has not been the work of six days or of six thousand years. From everlasting to everlasting enduring, time will in no way represent God and His agencies. Without beginning as without end, His years are numberless and His almighty energy has been ever in operation. Life Himself, life has ever sprung from Him, like never-ceasing streams from an ever-flowing spring. Creation, development, birth, change, renovation, are as much going on now as six thousand years ago. The fiat of creation, "Let there be light!" is uttered every morning over the earth, and the fires of daybreak tip every mountain-peak with the radiance of sunrise, awakening the world. Up in the air, on the surface of the earth, amid the seas and beneath the ground, work, incessant work, is going on, on the Sundays as well as the Mondays; and man alone, the favourite of Deity, is, for the good of his soul, privileged to have days of rest from physical labour, although not from more important and

higher work. The Almighty Worker himself is never weary, but, according to the teaching of Jesus, has worked hitherto and still works.

Our work is of two kinds—physical and spiritual. The Divine Father himself thus works. He who has appointed to the planets their separate orbits, and who supports the stars so that they faint not in their watches, has His work to do within our minds and His influence in operation amid our hearts. who has established the earth so that it cannot be moved, and who has hung the heavens by His understanding, enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world, and offers the help of His Holy Spirit to every soul that will ask it of Him. He who gives seasons to the sower, and the early rain and the latter rain which nourish the tender herb, and who grants us the milk and honey, the wine and oil, grants to the human soul seasons of spring and progress, a seed-time of faith and a harvest of virtue, a germination and growth of grace, a flowering of hope and fruitage of charity, a tillage of the intellect and culture of conscience, and thus ever worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.

In physical industry God is our example and pattern. The Father worketh hitherto, and still works through the processes of the seasons and the continued operations of His natural laws. As a manufacturer labours more than any of his operatives, as although an operative may be seen working while his employer may not appear to be so, the employer has in his mind all the effort of the undertaking, and all the calculations of his enterprize at his fingers'ends, and on him really devolve all the weight and burden of the affair: so, although His natural agencies are visibly at work, and we behold organic laws in operation, and see electricity flashing its creative light throughout the universe, and gravitation preserving the order of things, and attraction and repulsion, centripetal and centrifugal forces, labouring away at their different functions, it is God really who is working through them, upon Him all the order and harmony depends, and every operation of nature springs from His almighty will, wisdom and energy.

But to a higher industry than simply physical labour are we called by the ever-working Holy Spirit of God. There is a spiritual work to be accomplished by us—a work of labours which may be performed on the sabbath as well as on the week-day, and which should not be neglected on the Monday any more than on the Sunday. We have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. We have to labour to bear up under the burthens of life. And to encourage us in this, we should remember how Christ is still working for us. The presence of the glorified humanity of our Lord in the eye of God is an incessant intercession for the whole human race, as it dis-

plays how holy humanity may become, and harmonizes with God's desire to redeem and exalt it. Father himself is ever working for this through His Holy Spirit. Ever does His Holy Spirit plead with us against sin and strive to convert our consciences to penitence. Ever is His providence so regulating even the outward circumstances of life, that nature may reveal Him to us and experience teach us wisdom. Ever, even by troubles and trials, by afflictions and diseases, by reverses and crosses, He is working to bring us nearer to Him. Let us strive, then, to cooperate with this work of the Father, and to promote our own elevation towards Him. Even more than as the Author of the physical universe and as the Giver of food and raiment for our bodies is He working for us as the Holy Spirit and Regenerator of souls, by His love, by His truth, by His compassion, by the beauty of His holiness. O let us co-operate with His work in ourselves, and imitate His work for the benefit of others!

VL—THE RELIGION OF WINTER.

NTO the mouth of the Almighty, as one of the persons of his wonderful drama, the author of the book of Job puts the question, "Out of whose womb came the ice, and the hoary frost of heaven who hath gendered it?" To this question we of course answer, "From the womb of the great mother Nature—from the vivifying power of the All-Father, God." "By the breath of God frost is given and the breadth of the waters is straightened," declares Elihu in the great drama of the Old Testament.

God, then, is in these things, in this white frost, in this blue ice, in the wintry scenes around us; and wherever God's presence is recognized, there is religion. He is the God of the seasons, and there is a religion in winter as in spring, summer and autumn.

We must receive, however, the interpretation of science, if we would enter upon a true Religion of Winter. In generally ascribing the works of nature to the power of God, the author of the book of Job is right. But in many of his minor interpretations of the

uses of those works he is clearly incorrect. In the answer which he represents the Almighty as giving to Job out of the whirlwind he makes Him declare, "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow, or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and of war?" These, however, are not the uses of snow and hail. They fall to restore the balances of nature and to stay the ravages of pestilence, the result of a disturbed equilibrium of climate, and for many other beneficent causes; but not to take part in the fratricidal contests of men against each other. They are no more in this sense the artillery of heaven than are thunder and lightning, whose true ministry is the purification of the atmosphere; or than the sky, as elsewhere the author of the book of Job represents it, is as a molten mirror—a hard exclusive surface of blue and polished steel. In these and in many other like instances, we must go to science for the true religious interpretation of nature.

Thomson, in his Seasons, draws thus an analogy between those of man and those of nature:

"Behold, fond man!
See here thy pictured life! Pass some few years,
Thy flowering spring, thy summer's ardent strength,
Thy sober autumn fading into age;
And pale concluding winter comes at last
And shuts the scene."

The analogy here drawn is generally correct, but winter, like old age, not only shuts the scene, but prepares for its re-opening. Winter is not only the grave, but it is also the cradle of the life of the year. It is not only a sphere of conclusion, but one of re-commencement. Darkness, night and winter, begin as well as end life. To force your bulbs, you place them first in the dark cellar, to imitate the subterranean forces of nature and cause their under-roots to grow strongly, and give power and stability to the future rising plant. At a Council said to be held in Jerusalem about the year 200, it was decided that the world's birthday was on Sunday, April the 8th, or at the vernal equinox and at the full of the moon. Vegetable life would rather have commenced in winter, wherever it began, although it would not have shewn itself until spring; but supposing the same conditions of the earth to have existed at first as prevail now, science tells us that at the time of the earth's creation there must have been all four seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter, existing contemporaneously upon the various portions of the surface of our planet, in their relations to the sun.

Let us thank God, then, for winter. Let us thank Him for it, as it is here among us; while at the same time we rejoice to know that in other parts of our globe some of our race are delighting in spring, some enjoying the warmth of summer, some feasting on the fruits of autumn. Let us thank God that it is not winter everywhere or at once or always over the earth, but that He giveth times and seasons to all things, that so a chorus of varied praises shall ever ascend to Him from all parts and climes. Let us thank God, then, for winter; for its being the grave of the old and the cradle of the new; for its ministries in preparing the bread of the body; for its lessons of use as the bread of the soul; for the knowledge it reveals of the economy of nature; for the wisdom it manifests in God's designs; for the science it should contribute to our minds; for the charity and beneficence to which it should move our hearts; for its bracing north and its strengthening cold, and for all its adversities, which are but blessings in disguise.

VII.—THE USES OF WINTER.

MHAT are the uses of winter? What are its teachings for us? Can we find God's benevolence in it? Where are the seeds of spring? Where are the flowers of summer? Where are the fruits of autumn? Is this biting breath of old Hyems good for the lungs or for anything? Is this pinching cold Is this hardened earth and solidified beneficent? water a sign of kindness? There was a mad king of Spain who thought that, had he had the contriving of them, he could have managed the matters of the universe much better than did their Ruler. If we followed certain theological notions of God's government, there might be room for improvement, but the works of nature will give us nobler views of Providence, as interpreted by science and received into a religious heart.

We must turn to science, then, for the uses of winter. Spring-tide is rightly regarded analogically as the season of sowing, but winter has its relations to seeds as well. Let us take the instance of wheat, which holds the chief rank among plants cultivated for the use of

their seed. Justus Liebig tells us that very soon after winter wheat is sown, the young plant puts forth the first leaves, which in the course of winter and the early months of spring increase to a tuft. To all appearance then the vegetation of the plant seems to cease for weeks and months. But Liebig adds, "It cannot be doubted that while the growth of the plant appears to have ceased before the time of shooting, the over and underground organs are in constant activity," and food is incessantly absorbed; and there is every reason to believe that the far larger portion of the organizable matter produced in the leaves during this period goes to the roots, and that this store is afterwards applied to the formation of the stalk. He further tells us that "the action of a low temperature in autumn and winter, which puts a certain limit to the activity of the outer organs without altogether suppressing it, is essential to the vigorous thriving of winter corn." "It is a most favourable condition for future development, if the temperature of the air is below that of the soil, so as to retard for several months the development of the outer plant." "Hence a very mild autumn or winter operates unfavourably upon the future crop, as the higher temperature encourages the development of the principal stalk before the proper time, which shoots up thin and consumes the food which should have served to form buds and new roots, or to increase the store of organizable matter in the roots. Thus stunted in its development, the root supplies less food to the plant in spring, as it takes up and gives out less in proportion to its smaller absorbent surface and more limited supply stored up in it; and it retains the same feeble character in the succeeding periods of vegetation."

Let us not, then, complain of the cold, for it is needful for the production of our bread. It is as necessary for our autumnal harvests as is the warmth of summer. Frost and snow and hail are not heaven's weapons of war: they rather stay the operations of warfare; and they are God's means for aiding man in the fertilization of the earth, in preparing for the proper trituration of the soil, and bringing to bear the chemical agencies which promote its culture. Frost, hail, snow, vapour and stormy wind, fulfil His word. They are the angels of His providence—the messengers which aid in the performance of His beneficent will. We ought to be ready to bless Him for these stern but useful agents of His rule over the universe. ought to be earnest in blessing Him as well for the frosts of winter as for the flowers of summer and fruits of autumn.

Nor must we forget in winter the great truth, that there is One God—the sole Author of all things, the one Infinite Cause of all phenomena, which can be reduced stage by stage to a foundation upon His unity. Cold and heat are but two poles of one fact. In the days of ignorance they were considered to be two distinct substances. Fire or heat, after a kind of naturalistic polytheism, was denominated one of the four elements, and had attributed to it an independent existence. The test of experiment has dispelled this erroneous notion and vindicated the unity of the universe and of its Author. Fire cannot exist independently of causation. Lightning itself is the ignition of the atmosphere. The electric light is the effect of the combination of the positive and negative in the electric principle. When the action ceases of the fuel and gases which combine to produce heat, the material becomes cold, and we say heat is gone; but it is the action which produced it which only has ceased. The cold thus is only the absence of that action which generates heat, and is caused by a different process of the very same elements by which heat is generated. The idea of a system of causation is thus confirmed, and from the unity in the operations of nature we trace a unity of design and origin, and ascribe at once cold and heat to the One Great Cause of all things, with admiration and reverence for the simplicity at the foundation of His apparently most complex ope-In His light we see light, and through the rations. knowledge of His goodness discern the uses of winter and the good that is in all things.

VIII.—THE ORDINANCES OF RELIGION.

HERE is many a mistake made from over-confidence, not only in the matters of the world, but in the affairs of religion. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. at the ordinances of religion generally, all experience proves that they are not to be neglected with impunity. Let us beware of a proud, self-sufficient spiritualism, which, aiming to be higher, often falls lower than the ordinary standard of devotion, and which, trusting in its own strength, fails very frequently from neglecting the sympathy, the example and the assistance of others. What should we thus lose by despising Nature in the aspect it so often assumes of being an outward ordinance of God and a means of grace for us? What should we lose by neglecting the inspirations of spring, the lessons of autumn, the teachings of summer and winter? What should we lose by ignoring the symbolism of sunshine and shower, the analogies of flowers, the signs of the stars, the baptism of the waters and of the winds, the altar-sanctuaries which the mountain-tops rear up towards the skies, with all the rich

and varying services of external worship, which, accompanied with the choral music of streams and breezes, and birds and trees, go on in the magnificent temple of the universe?

No one neglects the institutions of public worship or the ordinances of religion without being in danger of losing that spirituality which, regarding his absence from the house of prayer and praise in the best possible point of view, he is endeavouring after. Many have thought that they could do without this or that ordinance; some that they could dispense with public worship; and among these there have been who have discovered their mistake, and who have found that the temptations of the world were all too powerful for them, and that the ordinances of religion were really means of grace and largely required by the soul to enable it to withstand its enemies. Others, who have commenced by neglecting the public worship of God, have continued by omitting His private worship and service, and gradually gone on from bad to worse, until at length their career was terminated by a vicious life and a hopeless death. Nor. as man is constituted with a side for the outward as well as one for the inward, with an eye for symbolism and drama as well as an ear for oratory and music, and with a faith whose excellency consists in its being developed through action, can external rites be wisely neglected by societies any more than by individuals. The Society

of Friends is a proof that a worship commenced with the intensest spirituality may yet fall away; and into what a state of decay and deadness has that society fallen! and how much of this decay and deadness has been owing to its virtually ignoring a large portion of human nature, by proscribing sweet sound and bright colour and all that poetry and symbol of external rite and ordinance in which religion, although not always rightly, has yet generally most wisely clothed itself! The continuation of any particular form does not indeed matter, whether it be the consolamentum of the Gnostic or the washing of the feet of the disciples according to the rite of the Coptic Church; forms may vary, and must ever be valuable only as the spirit fills them; but without forms are offered as means, the spirit may have nothing to work through, and great may be the loss to the individual soul, and great the deprivation to the assembled church.

Knowledge is the measure of responsibility. If we know these things, happy are we if we do them. The more we know, the more is expected of us; the brighter our light, the better we ought to walk by it. And to increase our responsibilities should be our earnest desire, for we thus elevate our manhood and extend its powers. And no person can do a kinder or better thing for another than to place him or her under some fresh obligation by putting before them a noble duty to be performed, a useful task to be accomplished, or

a sacred end to be attained. Hence the members of fraternities, of bands of faith, of sisterhoods of benevolence, of brotherships of service, which bind themselves to some honourable, devotional or philanthropic work, extend the highest helpfulness to each other; and we cannot better shew our interest in our friends or our desire for the progress of any one, than by endeavouring to convert them to the practice of devotion, or than by striving to enlist them in a cause of right or in a course of beneficence, for we thus give them an opportunity, not only of increasing their responsibilities, but of immensely enhancing and ennobling their enjoyments.

O let this knowledge abide with us and be to us an incentive to action and an inspiration of virtue! How blessed to feel the motions of the devotional spirit and not to arrest them! How blessed to know the Divine will and to do it; to know the whole counsel of God and to declare it! How blessed to be ever engaged in realizing the idea of excellence within us, in moulding into rites of holiness the devout impulses of our souls, in working out into practice the philanthropic conceptions of our hearts! How blessed thus to have our consciences at peace with ourselves and with God, to feel that we are not playing a false part to ourselves and to the heavens, but that our faith and our life agree, and our profession and our practice are in harmony!

IX.—THE MORAL INFLUENCES OF WINTER.

connects His different through which God connects His different natural dispensations. Winter is preparatory of spring. When from the frosty air we enter the atmosphere of a warm room, the skin tingles and flushes from the heat, although those who have remained within may be complaining of the cold. And it is in consequence of a corresponding accumulation of susceptible excitability, reacting from the winter's cold, that vegetation develops itself in spring at a temperature which is insufficient to retain life in the autumnal season. And thus so many of our mental and moral blessings become such through change, through series, through contrast.

The cold of winter is a beneficent agency of God to brace and invigorate the constitution of man physically and morally. In hot climates man is hurried to maturity and becomes dwarfed alike in his physical frame and in his moral standard. Our race under their influence fails to distinguish itself. Animal passions become rampant, and licentiousness and ferocity alternate in the human breast. The motives for in-

dustrial activity are at their minimum. Indifference to intellectual culture and disinclination to exertion of any kind, except under the stimulus of momentary passion, are among the characteristics that obtain. Were it not for winter and its moral influences, widely distributed over the globe, humanity would be far more a prey to its passions than it now is; the human constitution would be less vigorous; and those articles of fuel for which we have ransacked the bowels of the earth would not have been at our disposal to furnish their flaming breath wherewith to speed under their banner of steam our cars and vessels over land Necessity is here, as in other ways, the and sea. mother of invention, and we have thus to thank God for His teachings through winter when even we take our travels in the summer. To the cold of the winter we have to attribute a purified atmosphere, the destruction of much noxious animal life, the decomposition of many foul gases. The cold of winter braces the nerves, renders firmer the muscles, and generally invigorates the body of man, and makes him abler for the performance of the duties of life. We have thus to bless God for its healthful effects, for its tonic influence upon our physical organism, and for the beneficial reaction which it causes in our moral conditions.

. Winter itself is not without its direct moral uses. It not only braces the frame, but it invigorates the will. While the great want of man is a healthful

mind in a healthful body, we have reason to be thankful for winter. Its health-givingness to the body re-acts upon the spirit. It wars against the pettishness and little sins of an unhealthy constitution. It strengthens the body, and thus makes the mind more contented. And it is also a teacher of benevolence and philanthropy. It forces us to think of the poor and needy. What! can we be warm and comfortable, while the frost pierces the thin blood of others? Can we enjoy warmth and food while they are cold and starving? The frost-pictures upon our panes are graceful and beautiful, as the delicate fretting of their tracery is spread in lovely wreaths and sprays and branches, making a mimic garden upon our windows, and changing its forms beneath the influence of the red blaze of our hearth; but alas! for those outside the frost-work of those panes, who have no rich flame to cheer them, who have no warm food to sustain them. who cannot thus enjoy like ourselves the beauty of those crystal leaves and wreaths. The walk through winter woodlands is a glorious progress amid gleaming pendants which give a sparry vegetation to the trees. They glitter like crystal stalactites from the boughs. They shine like diamonds on each twig. They encrust, as with irregular surfaces of silver, the old brown bark. They present innumerable facets to every gleam of the pallid sun. They become irridescent with every ray which touches them with its painter's finger dipped in

the dyes of the rainbow. They hang in quaint festoons and moss-like garlands—those fancy wreaths of the frost's white weaving—from twig to twig of the hedge, from branch to branch of the tree. But while walking amid all the graceful frost-drapings of the winter wood, warm within with food, warm without with exercise, can we help sometimes thinking of those who, with aged frames and thin chilly blood, are crouching over some poor low fire, while the icicles hang from the thatch of their hovels? Winter thus teaches us to think of the poor and the needy. In the articles of its religion, the greatest should be charity.

The moral influences of winter are largely those of adversity. Its tooth is tough and fierce to many, but its hard clods contain quickening roots beneath them. There is wisdom in making as light as we can of our difficulties, as little as we can of our troubles. root of adversity is bitter for the time, but its fruit is sweet through all ages. Although winter is hard and may punish us, like all other of God's punishments, it is but blessing in disguise. We know we cannot have a healthful year without a seasonable winter From the womb of winter the young child Spring shall arise, scattering unfolding leaves and budding flowers in our path. In the assured conviction that the winter of our discontent will be made glorious summer, we exercise our trust in the love and goodness and unfailing providence of our God.

X.—THE TABERNACLES OF GOD.

How grand and holy is that vast temple of the universe in which God was first worshiped, the roof of which is the starry sky, whose lamps are the ever-burning lights of heaven, whose altars are the towering summits of mountains, whose aisles are the interlacing boughs of forests, whose chancels are the slopes of grassy vales, whose baptismal fonts are rivers and lakes and oceans, and whose communion-table is the ever-recurring feast of a fruitful earth and a genial heaven.

How amiable are the tabernacles of our God! How great and glorious was the idea of that temple of Jehovah on Mount Zion, consecrated to the adoration of the Divine Unity, dedicated to the worship of the one God—one temple to the one God of the whole world—one temple to which all the nations of the earth should go up to worship the one God of earth and heaven—a universal temple to unite in one covenant of worship, in one bond of tradition, in one tie of

love, all the families and nations and races of mankind!

How amiable are the tabernacles of our God! How solemnly sounds that cry from the voice of the Muezzin on the mosques of the Moslem, There is no God but God! Blent as it may be with utterances of error, this is yet true. Whatever the mission of Muhummed, that call to the worship of God is yet faithful. Whether we call him Allah or Jehovah, or God and Father of Jesus Christ, there is but one God, there is no God but God!

How amiable are the tabernacles of our God! Even when error is in their courts, there is some place which is still holy, there is some spot of their pavement worn with the reverent knees of worshipers which would elevate the soul of him whose lips stooped to kiss itthere is the hallowed intention, the holy trust, the belief in rightness, which still sanctifies their walls. All the prayers that have been breathed in their courts appeal for them, and all the contrite sighs that have there flowed from the penitent conscience. We recognize even in the groves of heathens some natural worship, some disinterested zeal, some struggle towards the true God. We respect even in the temples of idols the faithfulness, the piety and the devotion of their worshipers, however mistaken or ignorant or superstitious it may be. We regard with admiration the zeal, the fervour, the self-sacrificing generosity of all

who, under the name of Christians, differ from ourselves, however erroneous we think their doctrine, or contrary we deem their conceptions of God to those taught by Christ Jesus.

How amiable even thus are the tabernacles of our In cathedral or in chapel, in costly basilica or in small upper room, consecrated to religion, we ever find something to reverence or respect. however liberal or charitable we are, there is always one truth which commends itself more specially to our reasons, one faith which appeals the strongest to our affections, one place of worship which best satisfies our souls. Grand and holy is the temple of the uni-Often our spirits awaken to devotion with its songs. Often our minds silently adore as they wander in thought through its starry mazes. We have builded, however, a smaller temple, fitter for our convenience, adapted to our infirmities, where the ignorant are instructed and the feeble supported by the strong. Great and glorious was the temple of Mount Zion. our minds contemplate with admiration that vast idea of unity of which it stood forth the type and teacher. Often our hearts regard with affection that sacred place whence amid the ancient darkness was proclaimed the knowledge of the one God. But we ourselves have a temple, more humble but not less holy, in which, believing in the one God as a Spirit, we strive to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

We have indeed a temple of our own, dedicated to Truth, in which sacrifices must be offered. There is no religion without self-sacrifice. Those who will not give for their religion are not worthy to receive for their religion. For the support of our tabernacle of religion, the glorified spirits of our departed pastors appeal, the dead bones of those who are buried beneath it beseech, all our best feelings entreat us.

Private devotion is the fitting preparation for public worship. Individual prayerfulness constitutes a worshiping congregation. Holy sympathy is certain to unite the souls who share in it. We naturally crystallize in our religious communions.

Public worship is powerful in its aid to us as religious beings. It helps us through a combination of forces. It produces in us at once power, sympathy and enthusiasm. Power! for in numbers there is the consciousness of strength. We feel that our psalms ascend on high, borne upward by the chorus of other tongues. Sympathy! for our souls breathe forth their supplications in communion with others. We partake of their needs and we mingle our prayers together. Enthusiasm! for the flame in one bosom kindles the fire in another; light is shed around; soul inspires soul, until earth answers to heaven. One day, at least, in seven, we are, as far as may be, released from the cares of the world and freed from the little troubles and burdensome employments of week-day life. One day, at least,

in seven, we have special opportunities of communion with God, of spiritual improvement, and growth in truth and righteousness. The thought that, if we forsake the offices of religion, others will abstain from their use, should be a serious consideration with us. The thought that others, seeing our punctuality in public worship, would be led thereto, should be a pious stimulant to our devotion.

Let each become a minister of God by endeavouring to do something to fill his house of prayer with a larger assembly, with a more devoted congregation; and if not by outwardly beautifying His sanctuary, by decorating it within with truly worshiping souls, and by improving the institutions connected with it.

XI.—AS OUR DAYS, OUR STRENGTH.

HE Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." O let us thus depend upon the faithfulness of God, assured that He is true, though every man should prove a liar! However apocryphal the account of Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, it is a beautiful poem upon trust in the faithfulness of God. When the tyrant, wishing to tempt them from their fidelity to Jehovah, after threatening them with his fiery furnace, finished by asking them, "And who is that God who shall deliver you out of my hands?" they are represented as saying, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee on this matter! If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from thine hand, O king! But if not, be it known unto thee, O king!

that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." And through this confidence in God and determination to do right, they were strengthened in their day of trial as in their day of temptation. And although the authority of the second Epistle ascribed to Peter is doubtful, it is a true saying which it contains: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." that we may exclaim with the Psalmist, "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds!" O that we may seek strength from God in the day of our temptation! And let us not forget that our temptations generally come when we least expect them, and are always to be feared, as we are tempted to those things of which we are most susceptible—the covetous to avariciousness, the quarrelsome to contention, the disingenuous to falsehood. How important, then, to ask for the power of vigilance and the strength of moral resistance from God and to endeavour to co-operate with Him in the culture of these qualities!

Temptation and trial are very generally convertible terms. Thus Job is represented as saying of God in relation to his temptation, "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold;" and the Psalmist sings, "Thou, O God, hast proved us, Thou hast tried us as silver is tried." Only as trial can we connect the idea of temptation with our conception of God. Everything

in God's providence is a discipline for us, but all is arranged with the object of producing goodness. Thus St. James writes, "Blessed is he that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to those who love Him." But he adds, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desire and enticed." May we follow the apostle in this glorious doctrine, and never attribute to God that which is contrary to His goodness and majesty; and deeply feeling that nothing could be temptation to us unless it had a correspondence in our own desires, may we strive to purify the fountain of will through connecting it with the sources of strength which are to be found in communion with God!

God has so disposed His providences that His northern winds brace the frame, that His black and cutting frosts prepare the clay-clods for fracture and tillage, that His cold snows cover the fields with hot nitre, and are like a warm blanket for them in the winter; and that corresponding human afflictions and reverses are converted by His spiritual dispensations into lessons of education, disciplines of blessing and instrumentalities of grace.

Although, also, none might object to a trial of it, prosperity may be a more dangerous condition than

adversity. There are those who have died of joy as well as of grief; and there are those, before comparatively wise and virtuous, who on inheriting a fortune have become depraved and foolish, spending their quickly-gotten gains as quickly, and at length dying upon a beggar's bed and being buried in a drunkard's grave. But the effect of all outward things upon us depends upon our own inward states, and if we are right within we may be safely trusted with the unrighteous mammon, and deservingly rewarded with the true riches. And God will thus have furnished us with money for benevolence, means for social amelioration, opportunities of general usefulness and help for the institutions of religion, for the foundations of science, and for the endowments of philanthropy.

All strength comes from nearness to God, and all weakness from distance with regard to Him. The closer we spiritually are to the source of all life, the stronger we are; the further our stream flows from the great vital fountain, the thinner, the poorer, the weaker it becomes. It is by spiritual communion and purity of life that we approach God; and those who do not thus seek Him, who ask Him not in prayer, nor rejoice in Him with thanksgiving, who seek not to hold commune with Him, or to proffer Him a pure cup to be filled with the liquor of life everlasting, lose indeed that strength which cometh from above, and that portion of almightiness which is in Love and

Truth and Virtue, in whatever bosom they abide. Those who think they are strong because they stand alone, are flagrantly in error, both socially and religiously. Co-operation is strength; and the greatest helper and fellow-labourer we can get to assist us is God himself. O that we may thus seek Him and gain Him, and obtain that strength which can only come from the mountains of His holiness!

XIL-MORNING VOWS.

N the morning is the time for pious vows, for good resolutions, for planning out the benevolent works of the day. In the morning we should determine to do nothing mean or unworthy; and although we should even fail in carrying out this resolution, our failure will be less than it otherwise would have been; and our penitence for what we have done wrong and our rectification of errors committed, will be far more likely, more sincere, more strenuous. The morning vow will aid us to execute justice and judgment, for even if we break it, it will rise up in condemnation against us, remind us of our duty, and call us back to our posts of fidelity and watchfulness. A day well began, however, generally gives promise of a day well ended. A good deed done in the morning will place us in harmony with God and with our consciences, and thus most probably in harmony with others, through the remainder of the day. We cannot begin too well any period of time, or be too early engaged in pious thoughts or active benevolence.

The duty of the right employment of time is thus urged upon us. The great aim of life, the end of its disciplines, the purpose of all its trials and experiences, is the formation of character. Position, rank, usefulness, are all dependent upon character. It is of far less matter what our lot in life may be, than what our character is. God will not judge us by our outward position, but by our internal worth. and adversities tend to culture our characters, to discipline them for good, to develop in them a capacity for entering upon the higher purposes of existence, to produce from them a corresponding weight of influence, a strength of will and an ability for action,they are better for us than if our lot is cast in prosperous circumstances, which may enervate the soul, take tension from its purposes, weaken its resolution and dissipate its strength. The formation of character in time is indeed its formation for eternity; for although organization perishes, character remains, belongs to immortality, is continued in the future life. And in this lies the greater reason for the duty of the right employment of time. Time rightly employed will not only benefit us temporarily, by improving our characters and giving them weight and power and use in the present life, but it will benefit us eternally, by preparing those characters for the higher disciplines

and nobler activities and more glorious destinies of future existence.

We thus arrive at the idea of a condition which may be termed preparedness. If we execute judgment upon ourselves in the morning, we shall be better prepared for all the events of the day. If we offer our vows to God in the dawn of the day, we shall be more ready throughout it to press onward to the mark of our high The habit of forecasting events and of detercalling. mining action will give collectedness of character, such as shall guard its possessors against the panics of surprise, enable them to meet with equanimity any reverses of fortune, and strengthen them in endeavour under all circumstances. The principle of order, the planning intellect, which works by method, will enable us to take advantage of any concurrence of conditions which may work together for our good, will give us decision of character to seize upon the right time to do the thing that has to be done, and to gather in at the due period the ripe fruit of opportunity. And this preparedness, with its concomitants, collectedness and decision of character, has its mission not only for the life that now is, but for the life which is to come, for its function is spiritual; and inasmuch as these two lives are spiritual, they are in reality one. Character is immortal. Spiritual life is continued from time into eternity. Our bodies will decay, but our souls shall never see death. Preparedness for the events of time is preparedness for those of eternity. We must learn to live here as we would wish to live hereafter, and should forecast the far as we forecast the near.

When is the time for prayer?
With the first beams that light the morning sky,
Ere for the toils of day thou dost prepare,
Lift up thy thoughts on high;
Commend thy loved ones to His watchful care!
Morn is the time for prayer!

XIII.—THE RELIGION OF SPRING.

HE return of spring should be always an occasion of revival of natural religion within our The green of our grassy meadows and sprouting hedges, the verdant leafing of our woods, the early flowers of the season, whether peeping from the last autumn leaves of the coppice, uprising in the sheltered dell, or eyeing us from the hedgerow-side, should all remind us with fresh force of the revivifying power of nature, of the continuous and systematic agency of the great God of the seasons. inhaling the sweet breath of the spring, we should recognize the benignant influence of the Divine Spirit. The newly-awakened harmony of the woodlands, the clear notes of the birds, piping from the budding hazel-copse, or chirping amid the snowy-blossomed hawthorn, essaying their lyric minstrelsy in the freedom of the forest, or soaring and singing like the lark from the just ploughed field, or like the flocks of linnets winging their flight over the meadows, should lead us to attune afresh our psalms of gladness and

thanksgiving to Heaven. With a greener earth and a bluer sky, our thoughts and lives should more fully evince our joy and gratitude to our Divine Benefactor. Another spring has dawned, a clearer sky is unveiled above us; and with the new vernal season, new thoughts and new feelings should sanctify a spring within our hearts.

In the spring we sow our seed. It appears a small matter. The seed itself is a small thing. Even the gigantic oak arises from the tiny acorn. Thus our little thoughts are of much import. It depends upon their kind whether they creep upon the earth or grow in grace and stature towards heaven. souls are like seeds. Some are light and unstable, carried about by every wind of doctrine, like those seeds with wings of down, which are wafted about by every passing breeze. Other spirits are quick, hasty, impetuous, passionate, like those seeds which are enclosed in capsules, so elastic that they suddenly burst open and are sown at random around. The angry man's deeds are like these. There are seeds, again, which, although borne along by the wind, are furnished with hooks by which their flight is arrested, and they are prevented from being carried far from their native These are like those souls which are saved by some redeeming quality. Analogies are thus arrayed throughout nature. Seldom is a seed lost. The birds of the air carry it about in their beaks-oaks, it is told, have sprung up from the care of ravens—the seed is often eaten by cattle or bird, and yet retains its germinating power uninjured. From the cerement of the Egyptian mummy, in all probability a Ptolemy, at least as ancient as the Pyramids, the seed has been preserved, brought from the banks of the sacred Nile to those of the Thames, been sown and germinated and reproduced its thousand-fold. So with the seed of the soul. The thought or the word, the feeling or the action, have long-lasting effects. The good idea, once planted in the mind, will at length bear its fruit. The tract thrown by the wayside may catch upon a thorn; rains may wet it, winds may rend it, but some sunny morning it shall be picked up by a passer-by, to whom it shall be spirit and life. As we sow in spring, we must reap in autumn. As every seed has a radicle and a plumula, so has every soul its downward and upward tendencies. Worthy is the work of the husbandman and blessed be the seed that he sows! But, after all, how little is sown by the ministry of man, materially or spiritually! It is God who worketh in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. may plant and Apollos may water, but it is God who giveth the increase. If no seeds were to germinate in the soil but those sowed by the ministry of man, how desolate would be our meadows and desert our groves! Where in the fields would be the wild spring buds with eyes of beauty, and where in our woods the vernal

freshness of the undergrowth? Not through the labours of man, but through the favour of God, at the return of every spring, the grass is again green, even in the uncultured plain; the river-buds open their fair eyes amid the ripples, and ten thousand wilding flowers beautify the hedge-rows and woodlands, proclaiming the beneficence of the Author of life. Yet must man do his work, and Freedom and Truth have yet seeds to germinate on the earth.

- "Be patient, O be patient! Put your ear against the earth;
 Listen there how noiselessly the germ o' the seed hath birth;
 How noiselessly and gently it upheaves its little way,
 Till it parts the scarcely broken ground, and the blade stands up i' the
 day!
- "Be patient, O be patient! The germs of mighty thought

 Must have their silent undergrowth, must underground be wrought;

 But as sure as ever there's a Power that makes the grass appear,

 Our land shall be green with liberty, the blade-time shall be here.
- "Be patient, O be patient! Go and watch the wheat-ear grow! So imperceptibly that ye can mark nor change nor throe:

 Day after day, day after day, till the ear is fully grown,

 And then again day after day till the ripened field is brown.
- "Be patient, O be patient! Though yet our hopes are green,
 The harvest fields of freedom shall be crowned with the sunny sheen;
 Be ripening, be ripening! mature your silent way,
 Till the whole broad land is tongued with fire, on Freedom's harvestday."

The religion of spring is full of hope and expectancy.

XIV.—THE TYPICAL TEACHINGS OF SPRING.

GHE spring and seed-time of the human soul is in the season of youth. As the trees then planted, so will be the orcharding. None of us live to ourselves, neither sow we to ourselves. The seed that we plant will seed again. A single grain of maize produces 2000 more, and Linnæus tells us that one poppy-seed has been known to give birth to a plant containing 32,000 seeds, and one seed of tobacco established in a good soil to multiply 40,320-fold. Thus are our good or evil desires and thoughts immeasurably multiplied. If we sow anger, there shall arise around us an innumerable army of fighting men. we sow love, there shall appear beside us a countless multitude of ministering angels. Would we people the higher or the lower regions? Would we have our descendants bless us or curse us? Would we sow angel friends or demon enemies? Be it ours then to receive the seed-tide teachings of spring.

The return of the migratory bird may also instruct us. The prophet complains, "The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed time, and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming, but my people doth not know, Israel doth not consider." Without a compass to steer by or a pilot to direct them in their winged barks, without apparent provisions, the migratory birds undertake and finish in the most regular order a voyage which is often many hundred leagues in extent. Who marks out to them their track through the sea? Who informs them of the length of way which they have past, and of that which they have yet to accomplish? Who first taught them the exact time when they were to launch the plumy vessels of their frail bodies upon the aerial ocean, and what direction they were to take in that shipless sea? And who is it that guides their flight and supplies them with necessary strength and nutriment during their voyage? It is God, our God, the God of Nature, who has implanted in them the instinct which accomplishes this. He is their compass, their pilot, their dial, and the wind that fans their wings, and the strength that supports them. ever trust, then, in His kind and guiding providence.

Let the buds of the spring further teach us. What is a greater mystery than the bud of a flower? There is before us a little green calyx, shaped like a button, or knot or little spire. Within it what can be so mysteriously enfolded? Therein, tight and tiny, lies wrapped up as yet the daisy bloom, with its golden

centre and delicate white petals, tipped and lined with rose. In that small sheath is mysteriously hidden the deep purple and rich scent of the violet. In that green globe is sphered the golden chalice of the buttercup or the pearly goblet of the wood-anemone. What is more mysterious than this? Let us not say that truth is without mystery. Nature is as mysterious as God. The works of God are in mystery, like the parables of Jesus. We must not, however, confuse in our minds the distinction between mystery and mystification. A mystery may have its revelation, but mystification is a concealment. The rays of the sun soon reveal the mystery of the buds; they burst into blossom and display their various tints of pink and lilac, of gold and silver, and we call them by their names. So in the order of nature may we expect that in due season the other mysteries of God will be opened to our understandings.

The flowers of spring have likewise lessons for us. Again the snowdrop and wood-anemone silver and pearl the glade. Again the crocus rears its golden spire, and the violet shews its blue eyes amid its dark green leaves. God thus operates through a fixed order in nature, and His providential plan is a system of seasons.

In spring we have also a beautiful type of spiritual regeneration. Regeneration, reanimation, resurrection, are typified in all the objects of the season. The quickening spirit is in the breath of spring. From their wintry graves the flowers arise to a new life. In the words of the apostle, "what is sown in corruption is raised in incorruption: what is sown in dishonour is raised in glory." In the season of spring our planet undergoes a general re-formation. All things become new. There is a new heaven and a new earth. Everything is revivified, new-born, lives another life, arises as from death. Let us pray for a spring in our souls, for a quickening of our spirits, for a death unto sin, and a new life unto righteousness.

Beautiful is Spring! Beautiful are its blue dewy skies and its green grassy earth! Beautiful are the buds and blossoms of its flowers! Beautiful are the songs of its birds! Beautiful is the new life which speeds through every artery, which throbs in every pulse! Let us raise our hearts to the Giver of all this good, to the Bestower of all this loveliness. Let us make its verdant hills God's altars. Let our eyes rise reverently up to its azure heavens. Let our moral beauties bud and bloom with its flowers. Let our anthems harmonize with the glad chants of its birds. Let a spiritual spring diffuse its current of worship, praise and thanksgiving anew through our souls.

XV.—YOUTH, MORNING AND SPRING.

HE divisions of the day and the seasons of the year are like the different periods of human life. Youth is the morning of man's life, the springtide season of the human soul. "Remember now thy Creator," writes the author of Ecclesiastes, "in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Youth is set as a bow of promise in opening heavens. There has been "a sleep and a forgetting," and

"The soul that riseth in us, our life's star,

Has had elsewhere its setting

And cometh from afar"—

and now again it is youthful—possesses new energies—has a new race to run. Youth comes from God,—fresh from the bosom of the Eternal Creator. God has provided for it the weightiest inducements for following a life of piety and virtue, by connecting with these the highest, the purest happiness. God has given it powerful motives and glorious capacities—a sphere

suited for the development, discipline and exercise of these, and a prospective destiny exceeding in blessedness its greatest ability of conception. All is before it, where to choose. In its choice is its fate. to choose between a life of virtue and the rewards of the spirit, and an existence of wickedness and the punishments of the flesh. God, however, is ever ready to counsel it to the right choice. He has inspired a grand succession of interpreters of His will, in whom His light increased until it radiated from Christ Jesus, who directed us all to the Spirit of Truth which shall lead us to all truth. God's Spirit is always present with us, through intuitions and inspirations to move the willing mind. The nature of His righteousness, and the character of the rewards and penalties of His administration, are strikingly visible in nature. Has He authorized or permitted evil in the world?—it is that the votary of virtue should be strengthened by contest with it—that it may bring out and render firm the muscles of his soul, and give him bravery of spirit and crown him with the glory of a conqueror. troubles and adversities of life serve to test the temper of the blade of the spirit. In our battle-field of the world, however, God fights for us. Especially is He the shield of youth. However begotten in sin it may be, it appeared in the light of day some eighteen centuries ago as worthy of Christ's blessings, and we will not contemn it now. It has fine impulses, generous feelings, noble aspirations, which the world has hard work to blunt—which the world can never blunt, if youth places its trust in God. Youth is in Eden, in the Garden of God, and it is its own fault, and not that of Eve and Adam, if it loses its paradise. Let it thus place its confidence in God. Let it pour out its heart before Him who has said, "My son, give me thy heart." Let it seek refuge from the evil that is in the world, in His counsels, whose ways are pleasantness and whose paths are peace, and who is our Trust at all times.

The prophet Jeremiah records, "Thus saith the Lord, Execute judgment in the morning." This is one of those beautiful orientalisms of expression, one of those poetical utterances, which take almost the form of proverbs, of which so many are found in the writings of the Hebrew prophets. And at the same time it has beneath its beautiful figurative style, a fine teaching and a thought capable of very general application, as the rosy clouds of the dawn have behind them the sun that shall rise and shine upon the nations and fertilize The expression of Jeremiah reminds us also of the teaching of Christ, not to let the sun descend upon our wrath, and might have suggested it. perform the direction of the former, by judging ourselves and doing that which is right in the beginning of the day, in the spring and morning of our youth, we shall not transgress the teaching of the latter when the evening of the day is near or the sunset of our lives is at hand. Let not our morning thoughts, then, be evil and uncharitable, but pure and compassionate. us execute in the morning true judgment and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother, and let none of us imagine evil against our brother in our hearts. Let us lose no time in doing good. Let us embrace the earliest opportunity that is afforded us of practising any act of benevolence or mercy. Pure and compassionate should be our thoughts, and benevolent On each morning of our lives we our intentions. should place before our souls a course of justice and mercy, of rectitude and benevolence. Every morning, according to Zephaniah, does the just Lord "bring His judgment to light." Every morning should we fail not to do this, as He faileth not. Thus may we strive to become perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect, to imitate His light-bringing justice, and His unfailing activity. O that this sense of our highest duty were more constantly present in our minds, that we felt more deeply the beautiful lessons that are set before us by our Father's acts of providence, and endeavoured more to improve from them, and to love and serve Him more thoroughly!

XVI.—VERNAL MATINS.

EVOTION is a daily duty. It should be a daily

delight. At all times we should trust in God, our refuge, and pour out our hearts before Him. Not only when things are prosperous should we acknowledge God's power, but when they are adverse. Not only when God is gracious unto us, but when He afflicts and tries us, through the effects of His laws that we have broken; and even when, by His impartial legislation, He thwarts our selfish wishes and actions, we should recognize His mercies. We may not blame Him for the night while we praise Him for the day, nor weep at the approach of winter while we welcome summer with our smiles. Days and seasons and years, the circling changes of time,—hopes and fears and joys and sorrows, the stages of human vicissitude,—should

In the morning, cold indeed is the heart that does not assume towards God an attitude of confidence, of grateful acknowledgment, and of renewed faith and hopefulness. The dark night has passed away, and

alike be met with trust and confidence in God.

the grey dim dawn has burst over the earth in a blush We note that during the night the of loveliness. Author and Preserver of nature has not been idle. His ministries have bathed in dew the grass and the herbs and the flowers, and they meet the sunshine with a fresher foliage and with re-invigorated life. All things appear to have awakened from a balmy and strengthening sleep. It is a morning in spring, and morning is the spring-tide of the day. Nature rises renovated from the couch of night. There is a pureness in the breath of the morning air. Its first kisses are sweet. Its inspirations are purifying and strengthening. The matin songs of the birds arise in clear note and mingled harmony. The human heart is refreshed by all around. There is an elasticity in the feelings, a sense of aspiration in the spirit, in accordance with the general awakening. The mind is clearer, and has cast away the fatigue of the yesterday, and acquired new power to perceive and to reflect. The mornawakened scene, the preservations and blessings of the night, the grateful aspect of tree and flower, the songful bird and the humming insect, the cheerful green of earth and the benignant blue of sky, all arouse conviction of the mercy and goodness of God.

Who, then, should refrain from offering to God his morning sacrifice of love and gratitude? Certainly not man, the crown of creation, the head of His works! who has not only to thank God, like the herbs of the

field, or the winged creatures of the air, for renewed strength, but for a freshened spirit; who has not only to be grateful for a rest-restored body, but for a re-invigorated mind. Surely he must be conscious that that great and good Power, who so well preserves nature through the night and the darkness, will preserve that spirit, save that soul, who trusts in His mercy, and which is the likeness of Himself, a partaker of His own eternal essence. Surely he must be conscious that that Infinite Spirit which informs all things, will not only re-invigorate creation in its course, but ever inspire afresh the aspirations of the immortal mind of man.

In the spirit and in the words, then, of the devout Hebrew psalmists—those singers of Israel who have so many responsive notes in harmony with our common human wants—may the determination be strong and persistent in the soul, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up." Yes! look up—to that which is higher than ourselves morally, for locally God is not above us or beneath us, but within us and around us. Yes! look up—from our frequent low motives, and mean thoughts, and sordid pursuits. Yes! look up—from the visible to the invisible, from the temporal to the eternal. Who indeed can refuse to declare with the Psalmist, "I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me." Let

us rejoice, with the poets of Israel, "To sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High—to shew forth thy loving-kindness in the morning and thy faithfulness every night." Let us rejoice to behold God's face in righteousness, and be satisfied as we awake with His likeness. Good as well as great, loving as well as powerful, is our God. "His anger endureth but for a moment; in His favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Praise Him, thou morning, with thy rosy east, thy opening heavens, and thy dewy sward! Praise Him, thou spring, with thy sprouting seeds, thy unfolding buds, and thy carolling birds! Bless thy God, O my soul!

XVII.—GOD IN NATURE.

HITHER shall we go from the Spirit of God, or where flee from His presence? Can we ever fail to see Him in nature? In the everlasting changes of the seasons we recognize the omnipresent Hand; in the recurrence of transience we behold the presence of the permanent. Can we seek the solitude of the hills and wander over their pathless heights, absenting ourselves from the society of our kind, and yet find ourselves alone? Can we secure solitude in the wild forest or on the barren moor? Do we not feel in the loneliest place the consciousness of a great Presence, the pervadence of a mighty Power, the throbbing pulse of an encircling Life, so that we could exclaim with the Psalmist, "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me"? Are we not thus least lonely when most alone? With what a fulness of surrounding life do we breathe the air upon the mountain-top, as we glance over the extended landscape, and feel that while the skies encircle us, there is an Infinite beyond them! How grand the

Presence that fills the woods when we pass beneath their shades and hear the winds whispering in their branches! Amid the silence of the hills, what a consciousness attends us of awe, and devout recognition, so that stillness attains as it were a voice, and declares of God. And although thus alone, God walks with us and companions us and converses with us through nature, as His spirit communed with Adam amid the trees of Eden.

God himself is invisible in nature. And yet we feel He has a myriad universes within Him. And how great we conceive Him to be! How glorious we feel that He is! What a vastity of power and profundity of wisdom do we rightly ascribe to Him! O Lord, our God, Thou art very great! is the earnest cry of our hearts and souls. We feel it sometimes awful to conceive of God in His greatness. Abstract the mind for a moment, and strive to conceive of His greatness, in relation to the vastness which it fills and controls and inspires with life and being. It is an overwhelming thought. The mind may dwell upon it until the head grows giddy, as with looking down from a precipitous height, and until all space swims around, rendered fluid amid the undulations of thought. how vast! how immense! Where is plan and map? where is line and boundary? As we think, ever there appears a higher love, ever a profounder wisdom in God. Who can ascend those heights, who can sound

those depths of His goodness and knowledge? And what power is in God! Has He made all these things? Yes, and the substance of which they are Has He shaped all these forms? Yes, and form itself! Has He variated all these dyes? Yes, and He has created colour in its primal fountain! O, it is inscrutable this substantiating, formative, pictorial power of God, by which all things exist, are shaped forth and presented to the eye! Light of light-O how bright He is! Life of life-O how great is God! Who can understand Him perfectly? Who can comprehend His ways thoroughly? Who can discern half of His greatness? He is ever surpassing Himself, ever transcending Himself. We are lost in wonder when we think of what He has been, of what He is, and of what He will ever be. O there is wonder, and the presence of a mysterious awe and of a sacred dread, around our conceptions of the greatness of God in nature!

How small we seem to ourselves, seated upon a rock high up in the air and in the midst of a waterfall whose torrents dash down upon each side of us, leaping from precipice to precipice far beneath us, lashing themselves wildly into spray and foam, and raging on with the deafening roar of multitudinous sounds! How little we appear to others as well as to ourselves upon the pike of a mighty mountain, with the cold of the upper air benumbing our bodies, the wind coming

direct to us from the chambers of the heavens, and three countries spread out before us and beheld at a glance! What specks are we amid the torrent! What spots upon the mountain-side! And yet God himself is greater than all these things, than this earth, than those stars, than this unbounded universe; for He has them in Himself, in His mind, in His power, held in solution by His wisdom, products of a might which is inexhaustible, effects of a will that is never doubtful or relaxed!

Great is God in Nature, and greatly to be glorified. Let us wonder and adore. Let us bow down and worship.

XVIIL-LIGHT-MORE LIGHT!

spiritual meaning is ascribed to Light, and it is used as a metaphor to imply knowledge and holiness and joy. Knowledge is the light of the mind, the beam of wisdom which shines in the intellect, derived from the Father of Lights. Holiness is the light of the heart, the radiance which brightens the pure affections in the soul of man, and Joy is the light of the life, gilding it and illuminating it altogether. By appropriating to ourselves those principles of Light of which the Divine Character is composed, we can best serve Him whose word ever is, Let there be light!

Let us seek first the light of knowledge. Let us remember that he who would come unto God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him. Let us reflect that it is not foolish children, but wise, that our Father would exalt to His heavenly family. Let us consider how earnest we should be in wisdom and all knowledge to render

ourselves in any degree acceptable to Him whose inscrutable wisdom none can fully comprehend. To aid our own efforts after knowledge, God has unrolled before us the wonderful book of Nature and the wonderful book of the Soul, which together form the Old and New Testaments of His Everlasting Bible; and He has given us as their interpreters, men of science and philosophers, and prophets and apostles without number, and pre-eminently Christ. Let us attend reverently, then, to these sacred sources of wisdom, and with all our getting get understanding.

Let us also seek the light of holiness. Knowledge must precede holiness, as ignorance is irresponsible. Sin is darkness, and those who would aspire to mansions of light must leave its shadow behind them. Those who would say to God, Holy, holy, holy! must themselves strive to be holy, or their words are only Although none are absolutely good but One, that is God, there is a relative holiness which is possible for us, a holiness according to knowledge, a righteousness according to conscience. And the light of holiness will ever increase in us, if we will continue to feed its lamp with the oil of devotion. Let us more and more contemplate, then, the light of holiness in the life of Christ. Let us ever freshly open our souls to the Holy Spirit of God, and it will become the spirit of holiness in us, and ever cast a beautiful and sacred light throughout each compartment of our lives.

Let us seek thus the light of Joy. Knowledge is not only a light but a joy to the mind, which obtains a pleasure from its own exercise, receiving a delight in wisdom and a satisfaction in the attainment of Holiness is not only a light but a joy to the truth. soul, which derives from it an even, uninterrupted state of bliss, a sabbath-like serenity of being, a blessedness in the consciousness of rectitude, which no spasmodic tumults of the passions, or fleeting pleasures of the senses, or transitory satisfactions of ambition or greed, or lust or pride, have it in their power The light of joy has also its own gifts of It is natural to that humanity which God radiance. has created good, and in which He rejoices. There is a native joy and gladness in the human soul which always innocently gushes forth in the daylight of knowledge and holiness, when the night and darkness of ignorance and sin are absent. There is a joy and peace in believing, and a bliss which passes all understanding, for the intelligent mind and holy heart. Let us then rejoice always, for even in our most afflictive dispensations we have cause for joyfulness in our knowledge of the graciousness of God. We derive, indeed, from our conviction of His love and goodness, thoughts of consolation, incentives to cheerfulness, promises of bliss, which might make the mountain send forth its waters or the wilderness blossom.

There are times, certainly, even here on earth, tran-

sient as they may be, when risings of light and shining, glowing inspirations flush over us, however dull and bare and colourless the general presentation of existence appears; even as that slab of marble at the eastern end of the Church of St. Miniato at Florence admits a clouded glory of beams at sunrise, although through the rest of the day it remains a bare and darkened wall. Let us take heed and woo these risings of light—these glowing inspirations, for they are symbolic and prophetic of the coming day of heaven and the open glory of God. Yet our light should not be occasional, but continual. It should not come to us in flashes and then leave us again in darkness: but should enter in and abide with us for ever. It should not beam upon us fitfully, but should shine within us, ever more and more unto the perfect day. "Lightmore light!" was the prayer of the poet, and should be ours also.

XIX.—NOON AND MANHOOD.

WN the noon, the summer of the day, we should feel our hearts warmed to God. So far has He fulfilled His morning word-the day is complete—the sun has ascended to its height. Its day of industry is half finished. It will soon begin descending to its glorious rest. Can we doubt, then, the power of Him by whose mighty laws that majestic orb is guided on its course? Can we fail to note the perfect obedience to those laws of that highest of Heaven's hosts? How, then, can we doubt the power of the Divine Spirit to conduct our course rightly by the laws which He has Himself instituted? How ought we to beware of failing to render to those laws that perfect obedience which is yielded them by a myriad stars and suns, by the general course of the external universe, and by that sphere to which we are more especially attached, in which we live and move and have our being, to which, for bane or for blessing, we are immediately subject? How can we distrust the mercy of Him, by the disruption of whose laws there could be but a return to chaos, whose gracious laws alone prevent the anarchy of confusion and destruction, whose laws alike preserve the heavens in harmony and the earth in steadfastness, whose laws are universal blessings, beaming like His sunshine or falling like His dewdrops, with an equal love for all? Can we not say, then, with the Psalmist of Israel, "Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation"? Should we not thus cease to fear the terror by night—the arrow that fleeth by day—the pestilence that walketh in darkness—the destruction that wasteth at noon-day?

In manhood, the noon of the soul, the summer season of human life, we have special reasons for shewing gratitude and trustfulness to God. We have to thank Him for His guardian providence over our inexperienced youth, we have to offer Him our gratitude for the privileges we have enjoyed, we have to return Him thanks for the disciplines received at His hands-whether they have been pleasant or painful, whether they have come as the gentle nurturing and culture of our souls, or have appeared in the character of trials and afflictions—for in both these ways our Heavenly Father teaches and educates His children. We have also in manhood to devote to Him our maturest years, the meridian sunshine of our lives; and in the strength of His past care over our youth, and of the many righteous inspirations and gracious mercies

which then fell like spring showers refreshingly around us, to make our noon-day walk with Him, to build up our characters to a consciousness of daily Divine communion, and with cheerful confidence and obedient trust to look forward without fear or doubting to our declining days. Can this be too much for us to give to God? "Seven times a day," said the Psalmist, "do I praise Thee because of Thy righteous judgments." And to any of this spirit it may be said, "The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul."

May we appropriate, then, the spirit of Wordsworth's beautiful Noon-day Hymn—

"Look up to heaven! the industrious sun Already half his race hath run: He cannot halt, nor go astray, But our immortal spirits may.

"Lord! since his rising in the east,
If we have faltered or transgressed,
Guide from Thy love's abundant source
What yet remains of this day's course:

"Help with Thy grace, through life's short day, Our upward and our downward way; And glorify for us the west, When we shall sink to final rest."

In noon we behold the glory of the day, yet little poetry has been dedicated to it. It is all brightness, all warmth, all fire, the period of passion; or so sultry and oppressive as to woo to idleness or make rest needful. The labourer truly enjoys his nooning, or hour's leisure at noon. Then there is the clouded noon, the rainy noon, the dim, uncertain noon, and other conditions of the summer and manhood of the day, which have all lessons for us and afford us opportunities of devotion to God. To Him we best turn when we rise in the morning or lie down in the evening.

"And in the noon-tide hour,

If worn by toil or by sad cares opprest,

Then unto God thy spirit's sorrows pour,

And He will give thee rest:

Thy voice shall reach Him through the fields of air:

Noon is the time for prayer!"

XX.—THE BASKET OF SUMMER FRUITS.

KLL things around us are types of things within us and concerning us. So they were to the old Hebrew prophets, and so they should be to us. God's word in nature is a series of symbolic instruction for us, speaking to us in a language of poetry which is true prophecy, telling us that which ought to be, and which at length through God's spiritual dispensations shall be wrought out in us. Our Lord, as the Prince of prophets, was a great interpreter of this poetic language of nature, deriving high lessons of trust in God's providence from the plants of the field and birds of the air, noblest illustrations of himself from the bread which sustains the life of the body, and the fruit of the vine which cheers the heart of man, and glorious encouragement to his disciples from the fields white unto the harvest.

We behold thus a basket of summer fruits, as the prophet Amos beheld such a basket, as a figure of significance, as an emblem of something other and yet like to itself, as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual thing. We indeed behold it as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; but not so did Amos; for the same natural emblem under different material conditions is susceptible of different spiritual meanings. The basket of summer fruit which the Hebrew prophet beheld was a type of the state of his nation to him—dead ripe, ready to be gathered by the wrath of Jehovah, a type of the corruption and end of his people Israel. The basket of summer fruit which we behold is a type of the rich results which ought to be the fruit of our spiritual labours, of the gratitude which we should feel to God for all His goodness and mercies, of the devout thankfulness which should fill our souls when we contemplate the laden boughs of the orchard and the well-filled ears of the harvest-field. The summer fruit of our spirits should ripen thus in deep feelings of gratitude and fond psalms of thanksgiving to God.

And God will thus create the fruit of our lips. All His kind works and gracious providences combine to inspire us with utterances of praise and thankfulness. If we have ears to hear, His goodness speaks to our souls. If our tongues have language, we cannot but repeat the praises of His mercy. If we have any sense of gratitude in our spirits, they cannot but be filled with thankfulness to God for all the good fruits of His providence, for the blessings of the harvest season, for the ripening of the fruits of the earth, for the golden

ears from which we make the symbolic bread, and for the purple clusters from which we press the memorial wine and hold high festival to the honour of His Son.

Our basket of summer fruit is a ripened spirit of thankfulness to God. The earth shews its gratitude to God for the graciousness of His providence to it by the fruits which it bears abundantly. He has blessed it with sun and shower, with freshening air and with moistening dew, and it returns Him thanks as best it can, by waving its woods in His praise, by ranking its wheat-stalks in His honour, by holding up branches filled with fruit to rejoice His love, by shaking them into the laps of His human children, and pouring them in full measure, pressed and running over, into their Even the earth recognizes the goodness of God and rejoices in it, and returns its thanks for it in amber sheaves and crimson bunches, in clustering nuts and pendant berries, and in green and golden and rosy growths of all loveliness and lusciousness. And we must do more. We must return spiritual gratitude for material blessings, fruits of holiness for seeds of life, a soul of summer fruits of the spirit for a basket of summer fruit for the body.

O let this be the disposition of our souls! We pray day by day for our daily bread, and God has given us a basket of summer fruits, and harvests of riches gild and beautify our land. We ask for little, and God gives us much. We ask for daily bread, and He grants us fruits in rich abundance. Should not, then, a holy patriotism fire our breasts? God has led us to this land; He has given us this country, this England, this emerald gem set in the silver sea; and should we not be grateful to Him for our blessings, for our laws and liberties and privileges as Englishmen; and should we not yield Him in return a basket of our first summer fruits by striving to make our country yet more free and prosperous and noble, yet more a kingdom of His Christ, and consecrated to His service and glory? We must offer to God the first-fruits of our souls; we must consecrate to Him the ripeness of our spirits; we must bring to Him the sacrifice of love and the offering of gratitude.

XXL—HARVEST THANKSGIVING.

EW moons and sabbaths, although appointed feasts when held in unrighteousness are an abomination to the Lord, should be occasions of holy rejoicing to us. Especially should the harvest moon, filling with glory the large circle of its amber richness, be an object of devout thankfulness when we contemplate it, lighting homewards the wains filled with the golden sheaves of an abundant harvest, the fruits of our honest labours in co-operation with the providence of God. Bless the Lord, O our souls, and keep in remembrance all His blessings!

We pray to God, "that it would please Him to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so that in due time we may enjoy them," and He hears our prayers. Summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, His covenant of the night and of the day, yet remain to bless us. No contesting armies devastate our fields. No marauders drive our herds from their stalls. The God of Peace and His kingdom is with us. To idleness God is pledged to grant nothing. With our own works we are bound to co-operate with the labours of His providence. But what are our works compared with His? What in graciousness? what in power? The rain which falls from His heavens is worth millions of wealth to us. Truly the merciful kindness of God is great towards us.

To enjoy the good gifts of His providence without thanksgiving is like a robbery of God. We take thus without acknowledgment. We cannot receive rightly without gratitude. Ungrateful hearts only can take without a return of thankfulness. O let not such ingratitude be ours! In this season of harvest, let our souls be raised in thanksgiving to the Giver of the corn and the wine and the oil. Let us heed the words of the apostle, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice." We have nothing which we can strictly call our own. All things come to us from above and are a gift from heaven. The round world is the Lord's, and all that is therein. The earth has He given to the children of men. Even our power to labour is given us by God. And what would this produce of itself without the co-operation of God's providence, which gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness?

Let us not rejoice, then, without thankfulness to Him who thus gives us cause for rejoicing. Let not the acknowledgment of His benefits be buried in our hearts. Let gratitude flow from our lips, and express itself in love and obedience to God. Blessed be God for this glorious season of harvest! Thanks be to Him for all the genial fruits of the earth! Praise be given to His holy name for all the fields of the spirit which are already white for the harvest! O may He find a harvest within our souls that shall repay Him for the harvests which He gives for our bodies! O may He reap a harvest from our spirits, and garner them into His heavenly barns! O may our thankfulness to Him for the blessings of harvest help to ripen our spirits, so that they be found amid the sheaves of heaven, when He gathers in the harvests of the world, whose reapers are the angels!

"The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn. They shout for joy; they also sing!"

XXIL-THE RELIGION OF AUTUMN.



OD is deep in nature. God is the God of the seasons. As their poet sings in his sublime hymn—

"These as they change, Almighty Father! these.

Are but the varied God. The rolling year

Is full of Thee.

Thy bounty shines in autumn unconfined,

And spreads a common feast for all that lives."

The fruits of autumn are like the good works of religion. As the tree is known by its fruits, so is the soul by its deeds. There is a virtue, however, in season and out of season, and still there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to sow and a time to reap. The season for us is the present season, whether it be spring or autumn, seed-time or harvest. One season depends, nevertheless, upon another. If we sow not good seed in the spring-tide of our youth, we shall reap tares, and not wheat, in the autumn of

our age. The Author of nature is the God of mercy—His mercy shines throughout all His works. Behold the autumnal crocus! Its delicate lilac flower rises from the ground, frail and naked, with no sheath to keep firm its tender petals, and with no foliage to shelter it from the inclement blast. Yet God preserves that fair and tender blossom; and if we bloom in like circumstances of adversity, how much more will He preserve us?

Who has not rejoiced in the work of the harvest? How beautiful are the fields when they are ready for the reaper! From the green shoot of spring to the golden stalk of summer, with what changes of colour have they blest the scene! And the corn-fields of autumn—how richly brown or how delicately fair do they bow as if in homage to the passing breeze, as the breath of God; or stand under the stillness of the sky, like meek disciples gathered in quiet adoration, and calmly awaiting the reapers, as these await the celestial husbandmen, to gather them into the ripe sheaves of harvest!

What religious inspirations are to be derived from the harvest-field! In the fields waving with the golden grain, which is at once food for the body and independence for the mind, how generously good appears the character of the Divine Author of nature! By the benignity of the God-made laws of nature, those corn-fields glow, those ripe harvests wave in amber richness, the uncoined wealth of mankind. the series of the seasons, the Deity has ordained their growth and perfection. Thus bless we God for the general beneficent laws which He has ordained throughout nature. Yet let us not forget that His kindness is united with His wisdom. Our God. our universal Father, is God the Light as well as God the Love. He has even in His generous gift of harvests acted as a considerate as well as kind Parent. He has granted us the season of harvest, but He has given us motives for preparing for it. Unless we culture our ground, our harvest will be barren. Hence we have a motive for industry, which is ever the enemy of vice and the friend of virtue and true religion. Not the idle hand, listless with ennui, or, if ever active, active for no good purpose; but the working hand—that noble hand! that holy hand! tanned though it may be with sultry suns and horny and hairy with excess of toil-should rightly, according to God's law, reap the harvests of the world and garner the sheaves of a generous autumn! The honest labours of the field are intimately allied with the good works of the spirit. The industrious is rarely a vicious, generally a moral, man. Were physical labours more general, the harvest of spiritual virtues would become greater.

The religion of autumn is often sad. It preaches of the falling leaf, of the dying year, of the departing soul. There is a dirge-like note in its anthem to God, a toll as of a passing bell upon the autumn winds. The funeral service of the year is chanted by its hollow echoes. As the corn falls beneath the sickle, so do men die under the scythe of the reaper Death. The dirge of the falling leaf mingles mournfully with the autumnal breeze as it sobs amid the fading woods; and we remember the lines of Ebenezer Elliott—

"Drop, drop into thy grave, old leaf!
Drop, drop into thy grave.

Thy acorns sown, thy acorns grown—
Drop, drop into thy grave;
Autumnal tempests rave, old leaf!
Above thy forest grave, old leaf!
Drop, drop into thy grave."

Yet even the woods of autumn may afford a glorious and consoling prospect. They fade from the vernal green of their youth, but in the autumn of their age they are brightly clothed in leaves of red and yellow, and look smiling in their decay, like virtuous patriarchs whose old age is beautiful with the glowing deeds of a well-spent life; while the very fall of the leaf of such trees has a music in it, which sings of an enriched ground, whence shall arise heirs as glorious in bole and foliage as their forest ancestors. May Autumn thus console us; may she heal the wounds she gives; and may we ever find in external nature a blessed revelation of God's love for us! And may

Leigh Hunt's beautiful words be realized, and our earth go on—

"Growing harvests of all good
Day by day, as planets should,
Till it clap its hands and cry,
Hail, redeemed Humanity!
Earth has outgrown want and war!
Earth is now no childish star!"

XXIII.—EVENING AND OLD AGE.

 $\mathbb{K}\mathbb{N}$ the evening, the autumn of the day, we should not forget its fitting sacrifice—we should offer ourselves up to God. The golden sun is setting in the ruby west, as a good man should die with celestial glory around him. The flowers are closing their cups and sheathing their tender buds. not we also gather ourselves to God? The birds have their heads beneath their wings. Is there not a Divine Providence, in the shadow of whose wings we can make our trust? All nature seems ready for rest and repose, and gently the shades of night close and curtain the scene. Are not we also weary and wanting rest? Can we, however, omit to thank God for the mercies of the day, for the hopes of its morning, and for the blessings of its noon-tide? Should we deserve the slumber of peace and rest of security, if we thus neglected acknowledging His love and goodness? will," says the Psalmist, "both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell safely."

In old age, the even-tide of the soul, the autumn of human life, we have not only to trust in the power and mercy of God, but to prepare to meet Him. preparation ought indeed to be the object of our whole lives, of our morning and of our noon as well as of our evening, of our youth and of our manhood as well as of our old age; but much may have been neglected in this, and much must ever be left for the vesper-time of our days. Old age is the great sabbath of our terrestrial life. What thanksgiving is then demanded from us, for the many mercies that we have received from God — for the striking evidences we have beheld of His power, and for the enlarged experiences we have acquired of His goodness! What experiences of the benevolence of the Divine Father must old age possess! What wisdom should it have to distribute around! How firm also should its trust be in the power and faithfulness of God! Deeply should it believe that He who so long has led it amid the roads of life, will not suffer it to be lost upon the way, but will guide it even through the gate of death. Earnestly should it seek to carry out the words of Christ-to work while it is called day, since the night cometh in which no man can work. Its own needs are immediate. sleep, a little slumber, a folding of the hands to sleep,"

and it is in a more especial manner in the presence of God—there to be judged by its works, whether they be good or evil. God grant that its white hairs may not go down with sorrow to the grave! God grant that its sun may not set in clouds of darkness, but that it may fall as a shock of corn fully ripe, ready to be garnered by the heavenly husbandmen! O that our morning and our noon may be so passed, that we may look forward with confidence to the evening of our days! O that our youth and manhood may so have fulfilled their duties, that in old age we may possess a cheerful trust in the mercy of God, and blissful anticipations of our immortal heritage! Should not life have thus been spent, repentance, contrition, amendment, may not stay. By delay, the soul is endangered and must lose grace—how largely so One alone knows. Sere and yellow leaves, one after another, fall around For many, the day is far spent, the night is at hand; and God grant, when it comes, that though it be but an earthly night, it may break with the dawn of a heavenly day!

Let us offer, then, our evening sacrifices of prayer and praise to God, and strive at all times to trust in Him, whether our seasons be those of youth or maturity or old age. Thus may we pour out our hearts before God, the glorious Object of all prayer and intercession, and have confidence in Him as our eternal Refuge, as our everlasting Friend, as the One most True, most Fair, most Good, whose is all power and whose all mercy.

"When the bright sun hath set,
While yet eve's glowing colours deck the skies,
When with the loved at home again thou'st met,
Then let thy prayer arise
For those who in thy joys and sorrows share:
Eve is the time for prayer!"

· XXIV.—THE STRENGTH IN STILLNESS.

HAT extraordinary amounts of activity are there in the world of which we can only say that they had better not exist, that God does not require them, and that the world would be better without them! What activity is there in adding house to house and field to field! What labour to amass riches and gain honour! What Haman-like anxiety to erect a gallows for some Mordecai, to gain an opportunity of revenge upon some enemy, to drive some competitor from the market, to defeat some rival upon the hustings, to compass some end of commerce or ambition, to obtain some advantage of position or power! How often do we rush into things without due thought of their moral value or practical bearing! How frequently do we make work for repentance, or have to retrace our steps! Would it not be often better for us to sit still than to run off so quickly? Would it not be better for us to sit still than to rise so suddenly only to stumble and fall? The impatient balsam scatters its many seeds around, but how few of them take root and grow! In patience only can

we possess our souls and have a real dominion or property over them. Our strength is frequently in stillness even as concerns the ordinary affairs of life. titude, quickness, activity, have of course their value, but so also have prudence, forethought and consideration; and these last should be first and determine the exercise of the others. Our fastness, as it is termed, is alike commercially and morally wrong. Men too often go with the flood which they think will lead them on to fortune, but which whelms them in its waves, when they would have found safety and peace, and not lost honour and virtue, by keeping near the still waters. We may be as active as we like when we are sure our activity is honourable—as prompt, when we are as able to carry out as we are ready to conceive; but otherwise, by the slow growth of brown oak and red pine, by the silent revolutions of the skies, by the still yet incessant work of God throughout the universe, we are warned to be not in a hurry, but to wait upon the Lord and He will give us strength. Let us work on quietly, and not fret ourselves on account of evil-doers. Let not the noise of our tools be heard, and there shall be strength in our stillness, and the temple of our lives and fortunes, which stone by stone has been builded in sacred silence, shall at length be finished amid the sound of trumpets and glorified by the music of heaven.

Some people appear to make a trouble of all that

they do. Have they to use a spinning-wheel, it is changed into the terrible one of Ixion! Have they to delay their dinner for a quarter of an hour, it is a case of Tantalus! Do they fail in an effort, their obstacle is the stone of Sisyphus. Trifles are troubles to them the grasshopper becomes a burthen. How tiresome are such people to others! what curses to themselves, They thus dissiand how weak in their fretfulness! pate their strength, and lose all that repose of soul which gives the true dignity to life. There are real troubles enow in the world without our making troubles for ourselves: serious griefs to be dealt with, actual difficulties to be overcome, hills in life which must be climbed, mountains which have to be moved and cast into the sea of oblivion. There are adversities, certain, inevitable, from which we can be saved by no effort of our own, unassisted by God, our Helper. There are the deaths of the loved and lost; the sickness unto death of the near and dear; in many cases, our own afflictions and diseases; in some instances, our own trials and adversities. In meeting these, our strength is indeed to sit still. God alone can disperse our real and inevitable troubles. When we have sought His consolations and inspiring guidance, we may be as active as we please. Activity in good deeds will be a proper and solacing distraction from our griefs and adversities, and will bear its own balm with it. But first our strength is to sit still.

We have to sit still and resign ourselves to the inevitable providence of God in the loss of the loved and mourned. We have to sit still and remember His many mercies to us, and thus to take comfort for the future. We have to sit still and reflect for what purpose we are tried, and think what lessons our adversities should teach us. We shall find thus our strength in stillness-our strength made perfect in weakness. Putting aside our noisy sorrows, we should be still, and know that God is God. A powerful activity can only be derived from the strength thus gathered in stillness, as from the folded cup bursts forth the beauty of the flower, as from the sleep of night arise the working forces of the day, as from the repose of study is developed the energy of thought. Let us away, then, with all unholy murmurings, let us quiet our dissatisfied thoughts, let the stormy winds of our passions be stilled; and whether we rise up early in the morning to pray with Daniel, or wander forth in the even-tide to meditate with Isaac, let us gather strength for activity in the stillness of devotion, and often worship God in the silence of adoration, in that solemn hush of the spirit which is the sabbath of the soul.

XXV.—VIGILS.

N the midst of the clouds and where the dark-ness is thickest, there is God! Bosses of gloom adorn the shield which hides the secret place whence He reveals Himself. Out of the midst of the darkness He speaks with a flaming voice, as the fire leaps forth with a bright tongue from the black coal, as the lightning flashes from the bosom of the dark thunder-cloud. As from the shadows of the sepulchre, start forth His living inspirations, which make man stand upright. Where the night is darkest, His stars shine brightest. Amid the darkness of sorrow, when our eyes are blinded and we cannot see where our tears fall, there is He! In the midst of the gloom of affliction, when the cloud of evil days is over us, and no other beam can fall upon us and cheer us, but the moon is darkened and the sun cannot give us light, there is He! Amid the thick shades of trouble, when the darkness is felt in the soul and the spirit is so weak that the lightest care oppresses it. and the grasshopper becomes a burden, and desire VIGILS. 99

fails, because man goeth to his far home, and the mourners go about the streets, there is He! In the grave itself, ere the mourners have embalmed the body, ere the soldiers of worldly care have ceased to watch it, ere the radiance of the third dawning day has been reflected in warmth upon the cold stone, when all is starless darkness in the bosom of the rock itself, and no angel form has appeared to roll away the stone from the sepulchre, there is He!

There and elsewhere, there and everywhere, is God, for our Maker is all present throughout His works. But especially through His spirit, providence and grace, is He present where any night of sorrow, or distress, or persecution for righteousness' sake, or sickness, or affliction, or grief for sin, or death to sin, takes place; or wherever dreams of hope, or visions of faith, visit the spirit of youth, urging it onward to holy and heroic deed. In the night of the soul, as in the night of the body, is God present, and to Him we owe the vigils of our love and gratitude.

Blessed are they who can sing vigils of praise by themselves, as well as join in matins of prayer with others! Blessed are they who can rejoice in God when alone with Him in the dark stormy night, as well as they who go up to the house of God in company, and praise Him in the morning light and in the sunshine of noon! Blessed are they to whom the voices of the night speak of God, whose night thoughts are

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of Him, whose midnight musings are engaged upon His love and goodness!

As with the virgins of the parable, there will be ever some act of vigilance needed in the soul. The most virgin spirits will sometimes fall into slumber. There is always night in the soul until its Bridegroom cometh, shining as the Sun of Righteousness with healing upon its wings. O may we nourish, then, the duty of vigilance, even in the night season, that when we are called we may hear, that when we are wanted we may be ready!

An ever-vigilant state of the mind springs most logically from one predominant idea and constant aim of life. That we are ever accountable, that judgment in accordance with the spirit of the character of Christ is always impending over us, that when each soul is called to God's assize, the prepared will be rewarded and the unprepared punished, are leading reasons for our constant vigilance. Thus we should watch, and keep faithfully the holy vigils of the spirit. We should watch our minds, lest we slumber in insincerity and forget the truth, and worship idols of our own instead of the great God of earth and heaven. We should watch our hearts, lest we sleep in sin and are oblivious to love, and dead to its true holiness and immortal destiny. We should watch our hands, lest in aught unholy they should be found working, lest they should be soiled with unrighteous things, lest

they should not be engaged in deeds of goodness, or lest they should not be raised in prayer and thanksgiving to heaven. These are vigils which we can keep in the day as well as night.

A continual watchfulness is indeed required by us. We have to watch against incitements from within and against temptations from without. We have to watch against sins of omission as well as against those of commission. Especially let us be watchful for the coming of God's Spirit into our souls, that we may be ready to receive and welcome it. Thus, let the watchfulness of the day blend with the vigils of the night. As operation and inspiration, let them go on together, and let our watch-nights hallow our work-days, and our vigils prelude our praises.

XXVI.—THE WORK WE HAVE TO DO.

UR Lord proposed God as his own pattern, and directed us to do the same. That which the Father did, he did, in the sense of imitation and co-operation; and he gave us as his most royal teaching the precept, "Be ye perfect, as the Father in heaven is perfect."

Christ's work was incessant, like his Father's. From his early childhood he felt that he ought to be about his Father's business. His meat and drink, he declared, was to do the will of Him that sent him, and to accomplish His work. "The Father that dwelleth in me," he affirmed, "He doeth the works." It was this industry in co-operation with God that he adduced as a proof of his divine commission. "Believe me," he said, "for the very works' sake." And then he added that remarkable declaration, fraught with so deep a value and so great a promise for us his professed disciples, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth in me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my

Father." Our Lord, when he declared this, already foresaw in his spirit the little leaven which he had mingled leavening the whole lump, the mustard-seed which he had planted grown into a great tree, whose branches were spread over the earth and whose top reached to heaven; and contemplated through the prescience that had been given him all the extensive enterprize and wonderful missionary labours, the extraordinary educational industry, and far-spreading philanthropic works, which, passing over the doctrinal differences of sectional communions, form the great and ever-growing glory of his general church.

know the work that we have to do; and to know this and to do it is our whole duty as Christians. Even as God works for us, we ought to work for others. There is, however, a work to be done in ourselves and for ourselves, before we can effectively work for others. Let us ask ourselves if this is not the case. Are there not yet unbroken clods of selfishness in our souls? Is there not yet some hard ground of pride and obstinacy in our spirits? Has the plough of experience sufficiently turned up the furrows of our imperfections to our own view? Are there not some weeds of error or vice which we have yet to eradicate from our spiritual soil? Can we not find plenty of work to do in improving our own minds and hearts and spirits?

Man, however, is a social being, and is formed for

societary work. He has responsibilities to others which intimately concern himself, and social tendencies planted in him to which more or less he is compelled to render obedience. For good or for evil, "no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." very example of our own self-improvement is improving to others. The work of improving ourselves and that of improving others should ever go on together. The old monk truly said that "to labour is to pray;" but it is equally true that to pray is to labour; and except imperfectly and for accommodation we cannot disconnect the spiritual and material spheres. great work of prayer ever engages the Father, who is the only Hearer and Answerer of it, and ever employs the Son, whom when on earth the Father heard always without the need of words, so intense was the prayerfulness of his being; and who in his glorified state continually makes intercession for us, through the bve and light of his humanity, ever rejoicing the Heavenly Father, and thus ever appealing for the whole human And this great work of prayer it should be our privilege to be engaged in "without ceasing." It is a work which will enable us to deal better with the burthens of life, and to labour more ably through the difficulties which we may meet with in the world Prayer is an effort of the soul, which may be compared with Jacob's wrestling with God to obtain a blessing from Him. And the strength which should prevent our weariness in well-doing is one of the greatest blessings we can obtain. We frequently see no fruits for our labours, and fret and regret about it, not remembering that the most important things are invisible, and that it is not success but desert, not result but endeavour, that is required of us. What work of determination, what force of will, what an extent of toil, demands us! Yet the more we do, the more we shall be inspired and strengthened to do. O that each of us may be enabled to make our own the words of Christ and say, "The Father worketh hitherto, and I work!" O Father, may we be enabled to say this in spirit and in truth!

XXVII.—THE VOICES OF THE NIGHT.

HAT a picture, what a poem we have, in Jacob's nocturnal vision, when his head was pillowed on the stones, and he beheld a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it, as our holy thoughts arise to God and His blessings flow down to us! And then came the promise of the Lord God of Abraham and Isaac to their descendant Jacob. And then that voice in the night which has sounded to our days, " And Jacob awoke out of his sleep and said, Surely the Eternal is in this place, and I knew it not! And he was afraid, and said, How fearful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Truly this is a glorious voice of the night for us; and thus from any stony place, from any hardness of our lot, we too, like Jacob, may build up a Bethel, a house or city of God; and hear also in any land-

"The sounds of sorrow and delight,

The manifold soft chimes,

That fill the haunted chambers of the night,

Like some old poet's rhymes."

To David, as to Jacob, was the night voiceful, and the Psalmist well knew what the night of the soul was. "O my God," he exclaims, "my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember Thee; deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy water-spouts: all Thy waves and billows are gone over my soul. Yet the Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me." And on another occasion, when again addressing God, the royal poet declares, "I remembered Thee upon my bed, and thought of Thee when I was waking." How many of those holy songs of David, which are now sung from one end of the earth to the other, were meditated by him in the secrecy of solitude and in the silence and sanctity of the night! humble have been the beginnings of earth's most famous things! and how much has the night done for the day!

What a night was that in which our Lord and Leader was born! How momentous! how pregnant with the far destinies of humanity! That night was the dawn of a new era for mankind, which should exchange the sceptre of Cæsar for the cross of Christ, and the chaplet of laurel for the crown of holly. And that night had voices of its own, and angel voices, however they came, which proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and goodwill to men,"—voices of the night which have yet to make a better day in

the world. And nature might well be harmonious, when her Master of moral music was born, whose mission was to overcome the discords of the world, and to bring to mankind the spirit of peace and harmony with God.

The Christ well knew the consoling voice of his Heavenly Father's holy spirit, whose speech in the conscience can alone attune the varied faculties of the human being into concord. Often had his Father's words been put into his mind, and doubtless through many a night previous to his baptism he had meditated upon his missson and raised his soul to his and our God and Father, in psalms of prayer and thanksgiving, and in hymns of gratitude and love. As he himself declared, his Father heard him always, and always thus did he address Him, in the solitude of the night, as in the business of the day. Undoubtedly he went up into more than one high mountain to pray, and remained there all the night; and what utterances of devout trust and sacred joy should we have heard, had our ears been privileged to hearken to the communion between the Redeemer Son and his Heavenly Father! What outpourings of soul would our Lord at such seasons have addressed to his Father in heaven! What upgushings of love would have arisen from his heart and been wafted on high! What prayers of trustfulness would have ascended from him, and what chants of adoration! And all this prayerful

aspiration would be met in his case, as it will be met in all other cases, by heaven-descending inspirations; for the angels not only ascend but descend upon the ladder of God. The consoling voices of heaven would thus utter sweet night-songs into the ear of Christ, which he would remember and repeat in the day. And thus we read of an angel from heaven strengthening him, when in the night of his agony in Gethsemane, amid the willingness of his spirit and the weakness of his flesh, after having three times wrestled in prayer, desiring that if possible the cup of his suffering might pass from him; and after having sweated large drops of blood, so much was his body affected by his spiritual struggles, he was at length enabled perfectly to resign his will to God, and to exclaim, "Father, not my will, but Thine, be done!" A voice indeed was this of the night, this poem of Christ's passion, which should strengthen us in our sufferings, which are all so little compared with our Lord's great agony.

Let these voices of the night from the lips of Jacob and David and Jesus, appeal to our minds and exalt our spirits.

XXVIII.—THE PERISHING AND IMPERISHABLE.

KILTHOUGH matter in its essence is eternal, yet all the outward forms of things will perish, change and pass away. That which was once sea is now dry land, and that which is now the earth will again become the ocean. Rivers have changed their channels, and while some islands have arisen above the sea line, others have been submerged, and are only to be found as rocks on the chart of the navigator. The fret and fever, the wear and tear of Nature, The waves sap the cliffs and the storms blast the forests. The runnels wear the hills, and boulders of the rock force forth their granite foreheads amid the fields. The sandy plains suck up the tillage that is given them, and the clay-lands absorb the rains of heavens and drain the clouds in the skies. head of a lofty hill, or the staff of a forest, touches their skirts, and they empty themselves in showers. The dew perishes, exhaled into a mist, and the sun sings the requiem of the falling rain, as it finds its tomb in the earth, in that brilliant poem which it

displays in the coloured bow, the harmonious hues of which flow upon the eye, like music upon the ear. Then the same truth appears in a less fair and pleasing form, and one half of animated nature continues perishing to sustain the other half. And some life is all stomach to destroy the disagreeable and putrid. And the fly perishes in the beak of the swallow, and the swallow under the claws of the eagle, and the eagle from the bullet of man. Then the mightiest pine at length bends and breaks beneath the tempest, and the stoutest oak-bole becomes branchless and rotten and hollow. The bright rose blushes upon the air for a few days, and then its crimson petals are "frayed and faded and gone;" and the lily droops and pales away; and the leaves of the purple cup of the wind-flower are wafted off by the breeze. And thus even the fairest of all outward things pass away. They perish in the using. And since all these things shall be moved and are transitory, how important is it to find those which cannot be moved, which are enduring and everlasting!

The things which cannot be moved are spiritual—are those which belong to the soul or spirit. Such, for instance, are Love and its affections—are Truth and its ideas. Immortal is Love, for God himself is Love, the Parent of all volition, and therefore the primary Cause of creation, as summoned to commence by the word of power and wisdom. Eternal is Truth,

and ultimately to be victorious over all error, though creeds may crumble into dust and systems moulder away. What Love can be lost, or what Truth perish? In themselves immortal, their effects are indestructible. Do all you can, and you cannot destroy Love. Imprison its votaries, behead its confessors, crucify its apostles, and you cannot destroy Truth. God's mercy, and the love that is like it, will follow you wherever you go, however you turn away or think to escape from it. Be there ever so little a germ of truth enveloped in a mass of mystery, and, like a tiny seed in the ground, lifting up the comparatively huge clod, it will cast it away, rise above it, and thenceforward develop its own life. Truth, indeed, is God's word, and has an everlasting utterance.

"Our little systems have their day,

They have their day and cease to be,

They are but broken lights of Thee,

And Thou, O God, art more than they!"

And Truth thus is more lasting than any system. The eternal speech of God gradually causing itself to be uttered by the lisping and stammering lips of mankind, it will at length fill the ear of the universe with the music of its voice, and compel the echoes of all human hearts and tongues. Like Love, it is one of those invisible things which are eternal. And of this unseen army there are to be reckoned Faith and Hope and Charity: Faith, which out of weakness is made

strong-Hope which is not ashamed-and Charity which never faileth. And there is Patience, which performs the perfect work, and Compassion, of which it may be said, "Sick and in prison, and ye visited me," and Temperance, which is the regulation of life, and all those other virtues, concerning which it is written, "Against such there is no law." things are these; for although the earth may lack rain, Love never faileth; although the outward forms of religion may perish and be cast aside like worn-out garments, Faith ever aspires to the knowledge of the Infinite, and clothes itself with new vestures; although the virtues themselves may retire to heaven, Hope yet remains upon the earth; although a myriad troubles surround us, in patience may the soul be possessed; and although one shape or other of error appears as with ravening jaws and deadly fangs, going about like a lion, seeking whom it may devour, Truth will destroy them one after another as they arise, will shine brighter after each fresh victory, will at length be throned triumphantly and reign for ever and ever!

XXIX.—SONGS IN THE NIGHT.

N various ways for us, as for those of old time, it is God our Maker who giveth songs in the night. So is it for the natural night, and so for the spiritual night. So is it for the night of the earth, and so for the night of the soul.

In the natural night, we should seek God our Maker. The vigils of the nightingale are musical, as are the matins of the lark. With God, the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Him. In either season, His Holy Spirit is present to sanctify or solace, to be a comforter to the heart or a witness of truth to the mind. The natural night is indeed a most fitting time to remember Him. In its silence and solitude we may well be still and know that He is the Lord, and rightly can feel that we are not alone, for He is with us. As Young sings:

"E'en silent night proclaims my soul immortal;
E'en silent night proclaims eternal day;
For human weal Heaven husbands all events,
Dull sleep instructs, nor sport vain dreams in vain,"

And thus also Longfellow:

"Then the forms of the departed Enter at the open door; The beloved—the true-hearted, Come to visit us once more."

The bright dreams which flit around the pillow of youth—the rainbow visions of imagination—the midnight musings of genius—are all songs inspired by God our Maker. And what a time does night offer for self-examination and confession and thoroughly secret devotion! How many a youth has thought upon his pillow-"I will be good. I will be true and noble and faithful and devoted"! O that he might keep true to his resolution, for it was a song given him by his Maker in the night! And how many such songs has night brought to the poet, and he echoed into the ears of mankind! And has not the patriot often beheld in the night season the perfect city, four-square, as in a picture before him, or seen men march through life to music, or beheld the wondrous house of glass in which all knew as they were known? And thus had Numa his Egeria and his songs in the night. And these will come not only to the few noble and mighty who are called, but to the many suffering and sorrowing and watchful souls who most require them.

In the sleepless and wearisome hours, when the nocturnal solitude is full of spiritual strife, when the sigh or sob of a wounded spirit alone breaks the midnight silence, what want is there of such harmony as God alone can give, of such moral music as He only can pour into the soul! In the dark depth of midnight, when the ghosts of our past follies arise before us, when the spectral array of our sins is mustered to our spiritual vision, and our solitude is broken in upon by a multitude of accusing shapes of evil, and one large wan weird finger is pointed at us, as the inarticulate voice whispers, "Thou art the man!"—then indeed we have need of Him who giveth songs in the night, to soothe us and to cheer us, to speak mercy to our troubled souls, and, in the words of his Great Servant, to bid us go and sin no more. And when all is silence and solitude around, save the tick of the watch, beating like the pulse of the night,—when no human voice may be near to speak friendly words, or address consolation to the disturbed spirit,—if we ask it shall be given us, if we pray we shall be heard, and He who giveth songs in the night shall impart peace to us, and grant us strength in our weakness, and from our tribulation even furnish us with the verses of a psalm of praise and rejoicing!

So, also, in our spiritual nights, which may be darker to our souls than our natural ones,—for the hosts of God encamp around the dwellings of the just, and the night shineth as the day to them,—at evening time there shall be light, and a light shall arise out of the darkness, if we will but turn to God our Maker. He

that has made us can regenerate us, and our Maker is our Redeemer. What a night of discord is sin! What darkness and disquiet does it bring! But in God's light we may see light; and how great is the moral harmony which His songs in the night represent! They represent concord for the spirit at discord with itself, solace for the suffering, forgiveness for the sinful, quiet for the disturbed mind, patience for the afflicted body, peace and rest for the tried and troubled heart. Such are the songs which God's mercy sings, and which should inspire us to give Him psalms and hymns and spiritual songs in return, making melody in our hearts to the Lord. O that our hearts were as ready to give such a response of melody to Him, as is that instrument which awakes to music when the winds of heaven blow over it! No human fingers can so play upon our heart-strings as can the Spirit of God, if we but submit our souls to its inspiring thrill; and no music can equal that moral harmony in which all our faculties are combined and our powers attuned for the performance of the Divine Will!

Let us take comfort in the thought that God watches over us in our night seasons, both of soul and body. Let us not rest till we find where is God our Maker who giveth us songs in the night, and obtain through his Holy Spirit that moral harmony which was the essence of the soul of Christ, which is the basis of the true life of the church, and the condition of existence

in the heavens. O that we may open our ears evermore to the voice of God in our souls, that in every dark season of distress we may seek divine light, and in every time of trouble and disturbance go to Him in whom true peace is to be found, and all consolation and hope!

XXX.—OUTWARD DECAY AND INWARD RENEWAL.

HERE is not a single atom of matter that is annihilated; but its forms of being, its images of clay, its bodies of dust, decay and die. Our corporeal frames are gradually worn out by the stress and strain of life. Our muscles shrivel and dwindle The oil is dried up from our joints, and our limbs creak in their sockets. The house of our body, in which our soul is tabernacled, is soon dilapidated and out of repair. A tenancy of seventy years is the term for which our lease is drawn out in it, and we must leave it before we can get a newer and a fairer tenement. Age is coming upon all of us, even upon the youngest. The living are the dying. All things are comparative, and age is not necessarily counted by years. What we call death is generally the crisis or end of a process which has been long slowly going on in the body. That which we term age has less a chronology of days, weeks, months and years, than one of feelings, thoughts, acts, sufferings, successes, trials, failures, renewals and experiences.

Are we troubled? Although the outward man be perishing, yet the inward man should be renewed day by day. Day by day should we more clearly see, braided with all the colours of hope, that glorious iris blossoming in the skies, our Father's bow of promise, bridging the heavens and shining above the retiring clouds of adversity. Day by day should we grow stronger through trial, braver through hardship, more skilful through experience, more compassionate to others from the sense of our own infirmities. day we should more fully be able to say, turning our souls to our Heavenly Father, "Father, I fret less, and Father, I fear less, and I love more. I hope more. Father, I doubt less, for I expect more." Day by day we should be inspired to exclaim, "The road is less stony to my feet, now I know that thou, O God, leadest me. The way is straighter and less long, now that, through trust in Thee, I can behold the end." And day by day we should feel, "what trouble should dismay me, when I have God for my Preserver? My very tears shall praise Him. Though I lose all and gain Him, I shall gain all. Though I am over-laboured here, there is time sufficient for rest in eternity. Though I die to sense, such death is life, for my soul shall live with Him."

Are we afflicted? Although pains rack the body, it is that our spiritual strength should be made perfect in weakness. Are we aged? Years are the steps of the

ladder that lead us to eternity and God. And if we have truly received the Spirit of God, although the ear loses its hearing and the eye becomes dim, the inner man is renewed day by day; and, yet better than in youth, we are conscious of the presence of God everywhere; we hear His voice in the secret recesses of the soul; our experience has made known to us His movements in history, His inspiring action in the life of nations; and our minds are stored with facts of the beneficent operations of His providence in the universe, and experiences of His deep love and great favour to the children of mankind. And thus also with the agedness of the soul. As the materialism of its first forms of youthful life perishes, as it gets to know that there are higher things than the appetites and passions of the senses and frees itself from these, it arises into a new sphere of life, it accepts the dominion of a noble and self-sacrificing spiritualism, it becomes renewed, and sees things anew with the eyes of the soul rather than with those of the sense; and henceforth things that were dark become bright to it—that were obscure become clear. There are new heavens above it. God is no longer beheld as a God of fear, but as a God of love. Christ is no longer regarded as an executioner, but as a friend. Death is no longer looked upon as a dreadful end, but as a glorious transition. There is a new earth beneath it, which it no longer regards as a theatre of folly, as a shop of competition, as a place wherein to deceive and trade, to amass and spend, to tyrannize and destroy; but which it henceforth looks upon as a school of discipline, as a court of accountability, as a sanctuary wherein to worship, as the footstool of the Almighty, and as the very house of God and gate of heaven. Things before held trivial assume a solemn significance. Ties before considered sweet and desirable, acquire the authority of sacred sanctions. Tasks before undertaken carelessly, enlarge into moral duties and religious ministries. Every event of life henceforth appears in a sacramental character, and becomes an occasion of prayer or a reason for thanksgiving. And when the inner man is renewed, his religion is not found alone in his place of worship on the Sunday, but it goes about with him in all his daily walks and week-day labours.

Daily may we thus grow in grace, die to some sin, live afresh in some new virtue! Day by day may we receive some renewing blessing from God; and day by day may we not only ask for the bread that perishes, but beseech that bread of the soul which feedeth with immortal life! And as we approach the termination of our earthly course, may we be enabled to testify, "I have been young and now am old, and yet feel more youthful in the race which God has set before me. I have been young and now am old, and yet ever with increasing beauty have the ways and works of God shone upon me. I have been young

and now am old, and that spirit which the world would have deadened has been renewed by the Holy Spirit of God, and all things have become new to it, holier and more glorious, brighter and fairer and diviner." O may the All-Father, our God, thus renew a pure mind and a right spirit within us!

XXXI.—RESPICE—ASPICE—PROSPICE!

ROLONGED life gives us time for repentance, for a retrospect of the past, and for the revision of our course. Let the shadow of the sun-dial of our lives go back. Let us look back for a moment upon our past lives. Were they all that we could wish them to have been? Can we contemplate them in all respects with pleasure? Although we ought to be just to ourselves, and especially to render thanks to God for that which He has worked in us and through us, we must not be self-righteous, nor think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. And when we contemplate the holy character of Jesus, and consider the extensiveness of his great precept, "Be ye perfect, as the Father in heaven is perfect," O how humbled we must become! O how manifest must be our shortcomings! O how conscious we ought to be of our imperfections! How soiled with worldliness, how dimned with sin and error, appear our characters when we look upon them in the mirror of

Jesus! And how little do we know ourselves to be merciful as God is merciful, truthful as He is truthful, perfect as He is perfect! Have we not work here to do at once? for at any night our souls may be required of us, and that night of the grave cometh wherein we shall no longer work, as far as this life is concerned. O let us strive, then, to win the race of righteousness and to gain the crown of glory that is set before us! O let us press on, in the spirit of devotion and faithfulness, to the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus, and we shall walk and not be weary, we shall run and not faint! We shall find that culture of the soul under which all our faculties and powers are evolved, the true course of self-improvement which will alone render our works of real, of spiritual, of enduring benefit to Let us be dissatisfied with ourselves until that culture is effected. How often have we failed in the past! How deficient we stand in the present! How little we value the future! How generally we put the visible and the temporal before the unseen and eternal! Is there not here need of that metanoia, that penitent change of mind, of which the Greek text of the New Testament speaks? Is there not here work for repentance that needeth not to be repented of? And are not our years prolonged that we may repent and turn again, and not die but live, not die in the death of sin, but live the true life, the real life, the ever new life of righteousness? And is not time thus granted us for opportunities of self-improvement and of benefit to others?

What glorious opportunities of self-improvement have we thus before us! Do we desire to do good? Are we wishful to benefit others? Before we can accomplish this, we must benefit ourselves. To do patriotic work, we must be patriots. To do holy work, we must be holy. If we would reform others, we must be The language of the lips will reformed ourselves. gain but little credence unless it is emphasized by the language of the life. Our dole may be taken by him, but the veriest beggar in the streets will not really thank us unless our gift is given in a spirit of true compassion. It is the being that must characterize the doing; the motive that must hallow the act. Let, then, the years that are prolonged for us become our witnesses at the throne of grace, that, albeit with fear and trembling, we have earnestly striven to work out our own salvation. In the selfculture of piety, in the discipline of thought, in the exercises of prayer, in the regulated functions of holy meditation, in the right use of the ordinances of religion. in the employment of self-examination, in the habit of confession to God, in the daily discharge of that which lies daily before us, we shall find our best education, our noblest course of learning, the best gymnastic for our minds and the sweetest music for our hearts. Life is not given us for selfish purposes

or for our own enjoyment only. Think what we can do to comfort and make glad, to refine and exalt, to soothe and bless, in the days that are granted us. Think how we may aid, by work or by means, in training the young, in marching shoulder to shoulder with manhood in the battle of life, and inspiring it onward by the spirit of our example; in helping and solacing with the wine and oil of our compassion the maimed and the wounded who lie moaning by the road-sides of the world; in being kind to our relatives and friends, in smoothing the pillow of affliction, and in bidding God-speed to the dying. Think how we may benefit our country, by rendering obedience to its righteous laws, by helping to improve and elevate its institutions, by preferring methods of solid amelioration to party shouts or factious ties, by judging for ourselves in all questions which concern the polity of our state, and by acting in strict accordance with our convictions, proof alike against the bribes of lucre or of flattery, and undeterred by the intimidation of others. Let us think of all this, and how we may elevate the motives, redeem the characters and sanctify the lives of our fellow-men, and how our prolonged life grants us further opportunities of loving and of glorifying God!

XXXII.—THE LENGTHENING OF OUR DAYS.

E have to thank God for having lengthened out our lives for another year. To Thee, O God, we owe our lives and breath and beings—to Thee. O all-encircling Providence! to Thee, O all-sustaining Power! to Thee, O all-shining Light! to Thee, who art the Life in all things, the full, the ever-flowing Eternal Life itself. Forth from Thy sun go Thy beams throughout the world: forth from Thyself proceeds life to all beings. Cradled in Thy everlasting arms, watched over by Thy all-seeing eye, in Thee we live and move and have our being. Thou knowest our goings out and our comings in, Thou art acquainted with our down-sitting and our up-rising. Thou hast beset us behind and before and laid Thine hand upon us, Thou art our guide and support, Thou present and afar off, Thou instant, besetting, encircling, all-embracing, all-preserving God!

Gratitude to God for His goodness in lengthening our lives during the past year should thoroughly occupy our thoughts. And how many mercies have we to be thankful for! We live, thanks to the favour of God. and have not been removed like a shepherd tent, or cut off as with a weaver's shears. And what a mercy and beneficence is life itself! It is a beautiful and blessed thing. To feel the life within us, the dear, fresh, healthy, full, flowing life, tingling in our veins, bracing our muscles, tightening our loins, raising our heads, mantling our countenances and glowing over all our frames, is indeed a blessing and delight. may become a burthen to the sick, a weariness to the troubled, a load to the care-suffering, but in itself it is the most blessed boon of God, which should in no wise be despised, for it is that boon which of all others He has chosen to exalt and enrich and transfigure, under eternal conditions, making it the basis of all His future blessings, as a heavenly existence beyond the grave. And even in this world, how still more blessed life becomes when we consider its nobler and higher belongings; when with all the surroundings connected with physical existence, we ally the mental life and moral vitality to which they offer the spheres of exercise; and when we behold the flash of intellect and the glow of feeling lighting up the energetic eye and the gallant countenance, and exhibiting at once the sense of pleasure and of power which they communicate to all around! When the elastic step of health speeds onward to the help of the distressed, and the life of the body is moved by the life of the heart and

the intellect, what a glorious thing indeed is life; and how thankful ought we to be to its great Giver, and how grateful for the many blessings which it brings with it! It is a blessing to ourselves, for we feel its stirring, quickening, energizing power, as a joy and a delight, and it awakens our hope and anticipation in that life which is eternal. It is a blessing to others. for it confers a pleasure upon them even to behold it; it is a pattern for them with regard to all kinds of excellence; it stimulates them in the race which they see so bravely run; it inspires them to keep in step and time with that march and music of life which they see bearing so manfully onward, and hear sounding so cheerily and sweetly in their van. blessing to the world at large, for its sounds swell through all the waves of air, and its impression causes spreading circles of influence to flow forth over all the stream of existence. True life in any one declares, indeed, in the words of Jesus, "Because I live, ye shall live also!" And to possess this true life is a boon from above that we should prize most highly, while the least extent of life should be valued as an instalment of the highest, as temporal existence is a foretaste and prophecy of the existence which is everlasting; and should produce in us gratitude to God-gratitude to the Author of life and love, and imitation of him whom the Father especially sent forth to us, as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Let the words attributed by the Hebrew chronicler to king Hezekiah thus become ours: "The living—the living, they shall praise Thee, O God!" Let our prolonged days be more fully devoted to His service and glory. Let the life of our bodies lend to His service feet of succour, arms of help, hands of benevolence. Let the life of our minds give to His honour instruction for the ignorant and knowledge for the erring; and let the life of our souls yearn with ever-increasing sympathy for the sinful, and with ever-fresh desire to restore the wanderer to his Heavenly Father's home. And thus, O thus, the living—the living! let us praise Thee, O God!

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Part Second.

IN THE ORDER OF THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

I.—THE TIME OF CHRIST'S ADVENT.

HE era of our Lord's birth was well chosen in the counsels of the Divine Providence. The philosophical view of the Fall, without attaining to which all its traditions and legends are worse than valueless, assumes it to be a departure from God and from the influences of His Holy Spirit, and the same view of redemption regards it as a restoration from this lapsed state, and the realization by the soul of a constant and perfect communion with God. As men are to be acted upon, the proper agent of this redemption is man; and the communion with God being the end of the action, His Holy Spirit must cooperate with the means. We have thus a sufficient theory of an Inspired Man as the Redeemer of mankind.

In what age of the world would such a character appear, and his appearance best prove the reality of his divine mission? Manifestly in such a period of human history as should seem most in need of his aid, and in which various circumstances should concur to make his help most efficacious.

Our Lord was born at a period in which the fall of man, considered as a departure from God, had However charitably we attained its culmination. regard the ages of human history prior to the advent of Christ, it must be admitted that, from the morning of the world, the experiences of mankind in evil had gone on increasing; that they had gained wisdom in wickedness; that the pseudo-civilized nations of antiquity had become more deeply sunk in iniquity than the ignorant savage tribes from which they sprang; that evil, error and crime had enlarged their circles in the annals of the human race. Activity in some direction must ever be predicated of mankind: stagnation would find its consequence legitimately in death; and anterior to Christ's coming, the human race in mass exercised its natural activity in departing from the laws which the Most High had implanted within their souls. It is true that, in this night of the world, stars shone from heaven; but these proved the existence of the night, and appeared to shine more brightly because of the surrounding blackness. Every now and then, indeed, had some orb of light, like a Pharos amid the ocean, not only displayed the gloom, but offered a point of resistance to its dark waves as

their tide flowed in upon its island speck. What heaven so overcast with clouds which does not shew its blinks of blue? What exhalation so dense, so mephitic, which is not sometimes tipped with sunflame and crowned with the variegated hues of the iris? But although the stars of Zeno and Socrates shone, the tide of gloom with its cavernous waves evermore leapt up around them, like hungry hounds baying at the moon and longing to lap it from the heavens; and mere philosophy had done its utmost before the coming of Christ, and thoroughly felt its own powerlessness to save the world. The masses had not been touched by it, but sunk deeper into those troughs of the ocean of evil and sensuality which opened to engulf them. A few wise men from the east of thought dawning amid their souls, might recognize a spirit in the human form, as a star from heaven, and find it a guide to lead them to Christ, but the masses loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. The image of

> "The soul of Adonais, like a star Beckening to the abodes where the Eternal are,"

was scarcely then possible. Epicureanism taught to enjoy, but not to endure; Stoicism, to endure, but not to aspire. The age in which Christ was destined to be born was one in which the voice of Brutus inquired, "What is virtue?" and the tongue of Pilate muttered, "What is truth?" There was such a mass of

ignorance and sinfulness in the world as made it absolutely needful that a Saviour should be sent to it; and just enough inquiry after truth and virtue among the elect of mankind as would furnish an inlet into the heart and mind of humanity, and an opening for its redemption.

It was time thus that the Redeemer should appear; time, on account of the darkness of the masses, or it would be too late; time, as a few philosophers had loved wisdom and inquired after truth for its own sake, which is ever a prayer God loves to hear, and as they were in despair at their failure to lead man to righteousness. The republic of Rome had fallen from its rottenness, but a more rotten empire held its place, and against that empire, the tyranny and vices of which should increase until its end, it was needful that the idea of a kingdom of God should be set up, such as Paul afterwards preached in the city of the Seven Hills, and that it should take root and grow and prepare fruit to be gathered in by the northern barbarians, who should come like Attila, as the scourges of God, to destroy a civilization thoroughly false and rotten. It was at this period that Christ was to come, when the masses of mankind were guilty of vices which cannot be named, and the terrors connected with their idolatrous faith had lost all influence over them. Then indeed it was needful that mankind should stop in its fatal course and retrace its steps to God. And Christ's appearance at this time is a striking proof of his divine mission, and history a great witness for Christianity; as the world was at its worst before the date of Christ, and, although far from having attained his standard, has become better and wiser ever since.

Let us rejoice to recognize Jesus as the Christ in reference to the period of his coming. May our minds delight to dwell upon the wisdom of God in sending him into the world at the exact time when he was most needed to redeem the masses from their wickedness, and when the philosophic and prophetic few of Greece and Judea had prepared the way for him! May we rejoice to observe him appearing thus in the midmost of history, and, as the Sun of Truth and Righteousness, changing the billows of darkness into waves of light and glory! May we be deeply thankful to God who gave him to us, and, taking up the witness of history, say with increased faith, "Truly, this was the Christ!"

IL-THE COUNTRY OF CHRISTS BIRTH.

ROM the country in which he was born, we may recognize our Lord as the Christ. If he had truly a divine mission to become the Redeemer of mankind, he would appear in that part of the globe and in that particular land which would afford the best centre for the diffusion of his message, and among that people best prepared and adapted to furnish agents for its dissemination. And such was From ancient times, that sea in the midst the case. of land, the Mediterranean with its glorious hyaline, had its coasts covered with the most civilized cities. its waves ploughed by the most adventurous fleets, nourished upon its shores the most active races of classic paganism. There was Greece which had ruled the world, and Rome which was ruling it when Christ came. The way to Tartarus was in Sicily, and Mount Olympus with the ivory groups of the classic Pantheon was reflected in its level blue. The goddess of beauty had emerged, indeed, from the scud of its waters. There were"The isles of Greece! the isles of Greece!
Where burning Sappho loved and sung;
Where grew the arts of war and peace;
Where Delos rose and Phœbus sprung!"

There was the Italian peninsula, diademed with the city of the Seven Hills, as the queen of the world, with its golden eagles carried over the globe and its iron legions marching after them. And there was little Palestine with its seaport of Joppa, where Peter saw his remarkable vision which led to an apostleship among the Gentiles, the shingly beach of which had the colours of its shells and pebbles brought out by the Mediterranean waves which bore Paul's vessel, "fetching a compass to Rhegium," towards Greece and Rome. And in this little yet mighty Palestine, the land of Jehovah, the land of promise, the Holy Land, connected by a seaboard with that great central basin of waters, the glorious Mediterranean, and commanding a like distance to the main parts of the three continents, and therefore in the historic centre of the earth, was Christ born, that his light might not be hid, and that his word might run mightily to and fro in the earth and prevail. And at the period in which Christ appeared, the Jews had largely lost their exclusive character with regard to foreign nations, and had their merchants in every port of the globe, and their books of law in many a Greek philosopher's hands, and their synagogues in many a pagan city, as the Christian apostles found to their great advantage in disseminating the tidings of their Lord. The part of the globe, then, which God appointed for the nativity of Christ was that best fitted as a theatre for the activity of his apostles, as well as for the scene of his own labours, and indicates the wise action and providence of Him whose commission our Lord claimed.

The people among whom our Lord was born were chosen of God for this purpose, and this too in their own belief. They had long expected the coming of a Messiah; and although their Messianic views were often mean and contracted, compared with the Pagans of their time, who bowed not as they did before the One God of earth and heaven, but worshipped idols which their own hands had made, they were indeed the people of faith and promise. They were of that grand Semitic race from whom have come the leading prophets of humanity,—all the great protheic, poetic minds who have predicted events and blown over the world with their warm breath the everlasting seeds of They were the children of Abraham and the future. the prophets, stubborn in character, exclusive, bigoted, not willingly receiving any new truth, but roused when their imaginations were warmed, tenacious of purpose, indomitable in will, and holding fast to truth and conscience and duty when they were awakened From such a people fitting missionaries in them. would be found for a new religious Teacher.

was a special fitness also in Christ's being born in Judea, on account of the theocratic constitution of the The life of our Lord revealed the Hebrew nation. kingdom of God which was to be set up over all men, ruling in his own person; and it fitly commenced in a nation the ideal of whose poets and sages, however imperfectly realized, was to make it a kingdom of Jehovah, a state in which God should be the supreme ruler. The theocratical form under which the political life of the Jews was developed, had been a type of the universal empire of God over humanity; and its social · design had failed only because it wanted that individual realization of God's kingdom which Christ came to exhibit as a perpetual example to Jew and Gentile. Their monotheistic faith, theocratic policy, Messianic ideas and Semitic origin, all indicate the Jews as the people among whom the Messiah should appear.

We should behold thus, and not without the deepest veneration, that history bears a most important testimony to the divine mission of Christianity. And while observing that our Lord was born in the midmost of history and in the geographical centre of the ancient world, let us give glory to God that his light was thus exalted over the earth, that he appeared where and when he was most needed, and that even the way in which he was received led to that lifting up which should draw all men unto him. The more we know of the history of Christianity from its birth

to the present day, the more shall we venerate the wisdom of God in preparing for it and overruling it for good. In all the works and ways of God there is boundless wisdom displayed, but these are all made more glorious through His sending His Son as the Saviour of mankind.

III.—CHRISTMAS-TIDE.

T this season of the year, dedicated from time immemorial to social festivity, when with our Druid ancestors as well as with ourselves it has been customary by the blaze of the yule log to contend in mirth and warmth with the inclemency of the weather, and under our indigenous evergreens, holly, ivy and misletoe, to celebrate that ever-verdant nature which the snows of the season can only hide for awhile,—at this season, thus dedicated to festive mirth and social kindness, we have appointed a feast of rejoicing for the church in commemoration of the birth of Christ, the gracious Messenger of glad tidings of great joy, not only for our frail and changing bodies, but for our immortal souls—not only of the blessedness of doing well here, but of the rewards of righteousness hereafter.

At this season it becomes us, as Christians, to mingle with its traditionary mirth a joy of a more solemn mood, and exultations of a more sacred gladness, than human ties, however tender, or earthly

friendship, however sincere, can ever give. In remembering the nativity of Christ and the glad tidings accompanying his birth, we have material enough for this devout joy and sacred gladness. What sources of joy can be more sweet and solemn than those hymns of redemption which rise in recognition of Christ's coming to the souls of repentant sinners! What rays of gladness are more lustrous than those which shine from the spirit of Jesus, bringing light to the darkened soul and guidance for the faltering feet! His angels have sung-let us treasure up their strains. His star has shone in the east—let us follow its beams. What emotions can better fill the heart, or meditations occupy the mind, than those called forth by the nativity of our Lord and Saviour, who was born at once for the revelation of God and the reconciliation of mankind!

On his natal morning let us join in the angel song—"Glory to God in the highest—on earth peace—goodwill to men!"

IV.—THE WORD MADE FLESH.

Nother coming of Christ, "the Word was made stresh and dwelt among us." While devoutly rejoicing in this truth, let us beware of all those theological subtleties which have long confused the human mind and divided the holy body of the church. Let us look only to the spirit of the letter and its reasonable meaning. In the beginning God said, "Be light, and light was." "He said, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." The word of God is the expression of His desire, the vehicle of His will. and thus the revelation of Himself. The universe is thus the word of God, His mind expressed in matter. Had human ears hearkened well enough to the speech of the Divine in nature, and human hearts obeyed faithfully the spirit of the universe addressing the conscience in a still small voice, yet often with the eloquence and emphasis which beams from suns and stars and is rehearsed by thunder, then the laws of nature might have been the only word of God to mankind, and the sufficient expression of His will and

revelation of Himself. Mankind, however, destined as finite and imperfect beings to partake of the fruit of experience from the tree of good and evil, took little heed of the sacred utterances of Nature, beheld no beautiful words of God written amid the sunshine of the heavens, but, neglecting alike law and prophets, sunk deeper in sin.

What should rescue them from this? In vain to the besotted drunkard does the river-brimming, dewdrinking, well-watered earth read lectures upon temperance, and set forth the most necessary beverage of man. He gains therefrom but metaphors to stimulate his excess. In vain to the blinded eyes of hate are the heavens charactered with scriptures of love which are reflected upon earth in a hundred-fold harmonies. The hateful can see nothing loving and beautiful but it excites their anger. By them the best gifts and sweetest graces of nature are perverted in their reception. The kind voices of nature lead them not to the thought of His love who gave their tones, and every revelation of His authority is unobserved by their dulled senses or ignored by their perverse minds. An indirect action upon mind, such as that conveyed by nature, was insufficient to redeem mankind. needed to be acted upon by Mind fresh from the Source of Spirit. They required new minds, new hearts, new manhood. They needed the direct action of a mighty monarchal mind, which should open their understandings, awaken their thoughts, refresh their feelings, and again ally their souls to the Source of all spirit and life and goodness. They wanted God's word to be brought home to their consciences, God's laws to be manifested in humanity, God's character to be revealed upon the earth before them.

By the coming of Christ was God thus revealed to men. In him the word or will of God was made flesh and dwelt among us. In his life the general character and particular attributes of the Divine Parent are revealed, and we learn that our God, like His Christ, is loving and merciful, tender and forgiving, benign in will, steadfast in promise, and full of favour and compassion. In the coming of Christ we have reason to rejoice, as in him was revealed the gracious character of God.

Let us not forget, however, while rejoicing in the nativity of Christ, that inward application we can make of every event of his life to the condition of our souls. Let Christ be born in them. Let us put on the same holy mind that was his. Let him manifest in us the hope of glory. Let his spirit be within us as the power of God and as the wisdom of God. Every appropriation of the holy character of Christ is a birth of Christ within our souls. O let them become the cradle of the spiritual Christ-child! O let us nurse it and tend it and bear it about in our hearts! What burthen so sweet as the law of love? What character so Christian

as that which has the Christ within it? Do we resent not injuries? do we forgive our enemies? Then Christ is appearing in us! Do we recognize God as our Heavenly Father? Then the Son of God is being born in our spirits! Do we feel the filial spirit leading us to return from the evil of our ways, and inspiring us to be eech the forgiveness of the Divine Parent? Then the birth of Christ is going on within our souls! Do we tread down our sins and subdue our passions? Christ is born again triumphant! Have we nourished our insight with the inspiration that comes from God, until the mysteries of life and providence become clear It is Christ coming in the clouds of heaven, no longer to be rejected and crucified, as when he was born in Judea eighteen centuries ago, but to be throned and crowned in the individual life, and ultimately to establish the kingdom of God in the social state!

O may we not only rejoice with a solemn joy in the recollection of the first coming of Christ as the revelation of God to man, but may we welcome his second coming in our hearts!

V.—THE BRINGER OF GOOD TIDINGS.

EMEMBER the words of Isaiah, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth." How beautiful is the image thus brought before our minds! With what delight must the dwellers in a mountainous country, cut off by their position from the great routes of human communication. regard the messenger of good tidings! Long have they been waiting, anxiously expecting him, and at length his feet appear upon the mountains, seen afar off, then lost behind abrupt rocks or in cavernous defiles, then appearing again and thridding their way along some high and narrow path, looking like a long white line in the distance,—and at last he is beheld descending upon the valley, with his mouth sweet with the tidings of good!

Beautiful are the feet of such a messenger! Perhaps rumours of war had reached the dwellers in those hilly

solitudes, and he comes to dissipate their fears, to publish to them peace. Perhaps reports had arisen of dearth, disease, famine or pestilence, in the land around them, and he brings them good tidings of good, tidings that the people are in health, the pastures covered with flocks, or the corn white for the harvest. Perhaps they had been terrified by the bruit of an invading tyrant, and he brings them tidings that they need not fear the heel of a conqueror should grind among their hills, that their God has granted them salvation and really reigns over the earth. Beautiful are the feet of such a messenger as he comes over the mountains with elastic tread, and those who see him from the distance even, take hope from the confidence in his gait, from the assurance in his carriage, from the ease and joyousness of his bearing! Long waited for, anxiously expected, he at length comes, and his feet are beautiful upon the mountains as the watchers behold him coming nearer to their dwellings.

And if this illustration commends itself, how much more should the reality which it partially represents! If good tidings about relative things are beautiful, how much more should be good tidings of the Absolute! If a publisher of peace in secular affairs is welcome, how much more should be a publisher of peace with regard to spiritual and eternal things! If the feet of a messenger of good tidings about earthly matters are beautiful, how much more should be those of the

bearer of glad tidings of great joy concerning God's love to us, the glories of His kingdom, His fatherly position to us, the mercy He feels for us, and the heavenly destinies He has prepared for His human children!

Thus beautiful to us at this season appear the infant feet of our Lord Jesus. Grand was the view which Moses obtained from the summit of Mount Pisgah, and beautiful were the feet of Elijah upon the slopes of Carmel, but our Lord's mission was more high and lovely. He came to make known the Fatherhood of God, and exhibit his own Sonship to Him and brotherhood with man, and thus establish an example which all might follow. He came to bring good tidings of God's mercy and man's forgiveness, to publish the terms of peace between man and God, to proclaim to us God's kingdom and call us to allegiance to it, to make clear to us that God reigns over the earth, and to establish the love of his kingdom in our hearts.

At this Christmas season, then, let us remember and rejoice in all Christ has done for us. And it may be summed up simply in this, that we cannot read or think about him without becoming better, that we cannot truly believe in him or really love him without becoming very much better. This is simply put, but it sums up all the matter. If it is doubted, let it be tried, and experience will soon decide. No one can

study the pure and loving life of Christ without becoming purer and more loving, without desiring to be like him, and in some measure appropriating his excellence. May we rejoice in his birth, and with all our heart and strength give God praises for him! Beautiful amid the mountains of the world came the feet of Christ, and wherever his faith was, the world's mountains of enmity and sin were removed and cast into the sea of oblivion! Beautiful amid the mountains of our own hearts come the feet of Christ, and the rocks are rent, and the waters flow, and the rough places are made plain, and the wilderness blossoms as the rose! Beautiful upon the mountains, glorious upon the high hills of God, pre-eminent amid His most excellent things, raised above the mean and low to the heavens themselves, are the feet of Christ, in whose birth we rejoice—beautiful upon the mountains!

VI.—THE COMING OF CHRIST.

ROM different points of view it is equally correct to regard Christ as sent or as arising, as an inspiration from God or as the growth of humanity. Necessity and freedom, fate and will, destiny and choice, must have met and harmonized in his character, or he could not have effected his mission and been a Mediator between God and man. Activity certainly must be connected with him, activity from his own proper motive. We cannot regard him only as an agent of God-utterly passive and plastic-a mouthpiece merely to be blown through—a trumpet simply to be sounded. Assuredly he might have said, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not-I come to do thy will, O God." And so he really came. And thus the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that he was not of the nature of angels, but of the seed of He came as Man, in whose mysterious Abraham. nature necessity and freedom contend or harmonize. In him they harmonized, through his willingness to obey God's behests. But his own activity must not be forgotten—the willinghood he displayed in coming to mankind as a Messenger from God; and thus we love him as well as God, and rejoice in the recollection of his birth among us—loving him personally for his dear love to us.

While we love God above all, we will cherish this personal love of Christ. We will not lose him from our sight even in any imagined abyss of Godhead, will not have him taken away from us although to be laid in a tomb of Deity, where we should know him no more as the Son, the Friend and the Teacher of man. And thus we love to celebrate the season of his birth, with pleasant words that recall our thoughts to him, and with pleasant feasts which shew that our associations with him are those of gladness.

We delight also to imagine him before us as a little infant, opening his eyes with wonder upon the new country around him, and to think of his mother Mary as truly blessed among women at his birth, and of the joy of his father Joseph; and all the legends which superstition has connected with his nativity appear as nothing compared with these beautiful simple facts of motherhood and birth, parentage and infancy. For it is these which connect him with ourselves, which imply the need of culture for him as for us, which render reasonable the idea of his development, as expressed in the record that he grew in grace with God and in favour with mankind. It is these which render ap-

plicable to him the features in Isaiah's portraiture of Jeremiah, and allow him to be foreseen by us as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It is these which enable us to contemplate him as touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and as being tempted in all respects as we are tempted, and yet without sin. It is these, in fact, which offer the foundation for that future edifice of character which only on the supposition of his humanity we are able to understand, and which only on that supposition can be an example for us.

We rejoice thus in celebrating the birth-season of the infant Christ, because we foresee in him the perfect man Christ Jesus, whose manhood is the likeness of God, and at the same time the pattern for men.

How we might have been if God had not sent Christ into the world, we cannot conceive. Undoubtedly God could have taken some other means to unite us to Himself. That He took the way He did, ought to be a sufficient proof to us that it was the best way that could be taken, and in this faith we should peacefully and assuredly rest. Let us be certain that God did the wisest and best thing for us when He sent His Son into the world to save the world. Let us rest assured that there were no other means so efficacious for the redemption and elevation of man. We may be sure the method thus used was the most likely to achieve the end aimed at—the restoration of the soul of man to the moral image of God. We must accept

the great fact as it is, that so God willed to save the world, and by all our trust in Him, who made earth and heaven, we may repose contentedly upon the wisdom of His choice.

VII.—IMMANUEL.

E rejoice in regarding the birthday of Christ as a commencement of a fresh epoch in the revelation of the Divine character to mankind. We behold in our Lord at once the man Christ Jesus and Immanuel or God with us. Through him God has been brought nearer to us, has been revealed as dwelling through His Holy Spirit in the human soul, and as manifesting Himself to man in His direct and spiritual relations to him. Through Christ's love is revealed to us God's mercy; through his sympathy and compassion for the sinner is made known God's forgiving nature and pardoning grace. And we thus rejoice in remembering the birth of Christ as the commencement of a message of glad tidings, as a fresh publication of peace on the part of God to man, as the offer of a new covenant between the Heavenly Father and His human child, as the proclamation of salvation for the sinning and repentant, and as the inauguration. of a conscious recognition of God's kingdom in the human heart.

We feel that beautiful were the feet of him who thus went about doing good and conveying God's message of love from soul to soul; that beautiful were the feet of him who walked in the way of God, in obedience to His commandments, in illustration of His spirit of mercy and compassion; that beautiful were the feet of him who thus trod in the way of holiness, as an example and encouragement to us to follow in his steps; that beautiful were the feet of him who made known to us the path of peace, and was himself the light, the truth and the way.

We rejoice that by the birth of Christ a new spiritual and moral force was introduced into the world. Whether we regard him as Jesus of Nazareth, who for his filial and obedient spirit, and for the love which he bore to mankind, was made by God both Lord and Christ, or whether we contemplate him as Immanuel or the Revelation of God to us, we alike acknowledge the new spiritual and moral force which must be dated from his advent.

To an old decaying and perishing world, our Lord brought the new vitality of genius, the fresh life of virtue; and mankind was at once quickened and its direction changed from a course of idolatry and debasement to a progress towards spiritual religion and moral activity. Through him the old kingdoms of the world were changed to the new kingdom of God, which he introduced upon the earth. He brought faith to

mankind, true faith, trust in God as the Ruler over all things, fidelity to virtue, loyalty to the King of earth and heaven, faith in God and in His love and mercy, and belief in the capabilities of man to return to God, to walk in His paths, and to grow in the Divine likeness.

And this spiritual force and new moral life has gone on increasing since our Lord's coming, so that although we know not what we should have been without Christ, it is certain that we owe to his birth immeasurable blessings; that we have cause indeed to rejoice in it; that we should not have been what we are, that the world would not have been what it is, that benevolence would not have so fairly blossomed, that the seeds of self-sacrifice would not have been so gloriously sown, or heroism have been so sainted, or the crimson banner of martyrdom waved so brightly amid the battle for freedom, or the path to the other world been so beautifully paved and rendered clear to us, had he not been born and lived and suffered and died and risen again.

Thanks be to God for His glorious Christ! In him we behold the Heavenly Father's love and mercy for the children of men. He is our Immanuel—God with us! Let us evermore recognize in Christ, not the personal embodiment, for that were idolatry, but the spiritual likeness and moral image, of our Heavenly Father; and may we be changed into the same resemblance, from glory to glory!

VIII.—EPIPHANY.

ANY of the legends which have gathered around the nativity of our Lord are beautiful, but not so lovely as the truth itself. The songs of the angels in the heavens, and the vigils of the shepherds upon earth, are a fine poetical symbolization of the decrees of Providence and the wants of humanity alike concurring in the birth of Christ. The progress of the star from the East until it stood over his birth-place, is a bright figure of the anticipation of the oriental sages that a great leader would be born for the salvation of the human race. The manifestation of Christ to the world was yet in nobler forms than these. mission was to become a preacher of truth and righteousness to mankind. We read that he said unto his disciples, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth." And on another momentous occasion he is recorded to have declared, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, to bear witness unto the truth." This was the true epiphany of our Lord, for with no

more sacred purpose can a man come forth into the world than to preach righteousness and bear witness of the truth.

Great are the evils from which we have been saved through Christ's preaching of truth and righteousness, and the planting and development of his spiritual reli-That God's will was known to a favoured few before his advent, and that the order of God's providence and the method of His laws have been still further revealed since his death, should in no way abate the gratitude which we owe to the memory of our Lord for that holy unity which he taught us to see throughout the kingdom of Nature, for that direct intercourse which he instructed us to hold with the Author of our beings, for his redemption of the human mind from its general condition of error and confusion as to the order of things, and for his elevation of our souls to a purity of devotion only conceivable in direction to one Object, and that a spiritual and allperfect One.

Granted that advances had been made in this knowledge by Moses, by Zoroaster, by Confucius, by Plato; granted that our Lord was ignorant of the more perfect interpretations of nature which obtain in this day;—all the more wonderful were his revelations of absolute truth; and anointed by all the holy priesthood of humanity, and crowned by the stately patriarchal form of history, he manifestly stands forth as the central

figure of the world, and is thus indicated as the preeminent instrument of God in directing the providential destinies of the human race. He appeared at the turning-point of history, when the turbid waves of darkness, superstition and bigotry were turned back; when the light of Gentile philosophy began to influence men's minds; when the world craved for something better, truer, holier; when a universal political empire made a high road throughout the earth, and dimly shadowed forth a universal spiritual empire of truth and virtue; and he radiantly stood forth as a perfect image of this new empire, manifesting by the holiness of his character the supremacy of the kingdom of God in the soul, and by a sweet yet sublime personality wooing mankind to love and reverence it.

And since the appearance of our Lord on earth, humanity has received an impetus in knowledge and civilization which is clearly traceable to his influence. He sanctified Greek Art and Roman Empire through the introduction of a universal morality; and, by his example of public preaching to the people, avouched the equality of all souls before God, and commenced the destruction of caste-prejudice and exclusive hierarchies, and with them of political tyranny and religious bigotry and superstition. The abolition of slavery, the enfranchisement of women, the education of children, the liberation of nations, and the consecration of free thought, were thus most solemnly inaugu-

rated by our Lord, and emphasized by his appeals to the people.

We are all, under God, most largely indebted to the influence of Christ for the formation of our characters and the arrangement of the civilizing institutions of the world; and even the best of those who do not fight under the banners of his nominal churches, owe their position of free thought to his devotion to truth, have derived their enmity to the superstitions which have corrupted his work from the example of his spirituality, and only stand apart from others, who unworthily bear his name, because they better comprehend his genius, and have higher ideas of his character and teaching.

IX.—CHRISTIANITY.

GHE pre-eminence of our Lord, as God's instrument in directing the destinies of humanity, is evident from the position which Christianity has obtained in the world. As every movement in the material universe originates in the One Divine Cause, so in the spiritual universe all religious dispensations proceed from God and are moved and controlled by His almighty providence. It does not follow that they are all equally good, wise or progressive, or equally suitable for man in a state of scientific attainment, any more than that the material genera of beings are equally intelligent and perfect. On the contrary, we observe graduation, subordination, series, in all the departments of nature. The works of God are infinitely various and more or less progressive in their natures, and He is ever improving their types and succeeding one by another. In the development of man the Creator's works culminated; and as the human race exceeds in perfection all other orders of animal existence, so is the most humane religion the

highest, and there is one dispensation of religion preeminent above all others, and that is Christianity.

There is, indeed, but one true and absolute religion in all developments of religious inspiration, and that has attained its apogèe in the Christian dispensation, which is at once traditionary and illimitable. are, however, two distinct genera of religious dispensations, as well as of animal organisms—the progressive and the non-progressive. The human races compose the former, and the other animal kinds the latter of these. Man is at once a traditional and a progressive being. Human experience is received and transmitted by one generation to another; and human society, from this accumulation of knowledge, is always developing new attitudes of thought and action. different with other species of animals, who obtain that degree of perfection to which they are destined at once, without heritage of the treasures of experience or the capability of transmitting knowledge themselves. Christianity among religions is like man among the animals. It is so by its more humane nature and by its historic origin. It has received its traditions from Judaism; it has transmitted some of its influence to Muhummedanism; but it has gone on developing its own special corporate life into higher manifestations of thought and feeling. Brahminism and Buddhism have been comparatively the same as they were from the beginning, but Christianity has gone on expanding

like a flower-bud from every warm wind of love or new ray of light which has breathed or shone upon it; and it has yet to attain in the fulness of its blossom such a flowering of the absolute religion as cannot be exceeded by the hopes or knowledge of the most devout or scientific minds.

While all other systems are from God, possessing some amount of truth in them, and being more or less perfect, like His other works, the Christian dispensation is in a higher sense than others a divine revelation, because it is less exclusive and more humane and progressive; and this is further proved by its having become predominant over all other religions in the most enlightened, practical and scientific nations of the earth. The destruction of Christianity is impossible, because it has absorbed in itself the progress of humanity, and has in its core the essence of absolute religion, which as an immortal seed must ever survive, however its outward husks fall off and perish. Bigotry in the church must decay as knowledge spreads. Criticism from outside the church can only call attention to its errors, improve its morals and increase its zeal. Its apparent enemies will do more good to it than its false friends. And Christianity contains within itself the prophecy of its own temporary corruptions, and of its ultimate purification by the spirit of all truth, before its final attainment of universal empire.

Under God, then, we owe this Christianity to the life and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth. It was for this cause he was manifested to the world. Neither the Greek term of Christ, nor the Hebrew title of Messiah, will adequately represent the character and mission of our Lord to us, although at periods of his ministry they were sufficiently descriptive, and he himself accepted them. By his spirituality, by his universality, by the absoluteness of his religion, he far surpassed the Messianic conceptions of the Jews. That he was a man to all intents and purposes, no logical thinker can doubt; but it is equally clear that he was more than a man, in the sense of being the pre-eminent instrument chosen by God for directing the destinies of the human race in the central crisis of their history through time and for immortality.

Names are of little consequence as compared with ideas and facts. It is for the noble ideas that we entertain of God's love and man's brotherhood, and for the glorious facts of personal regeneration and social progress, that we have to be thankful to our Lord. And in our gratitude for these, let us never forget the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, as the Giver of all good gifts, as the bountiful Benefactor, as the Source of all joy and bliss, and the Bestower of life and all its blessings.

X.-LENT.

T is not the outward public fast-day, but the inward private fast, which is the true keeping of Lent in the sight of God. "Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness," said the prophet to some in his day, and probably his description is applicable to some in our own. "Ye shall not so fast," he adds, "to make your voice be heard on high." And our Lord teaches us, "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

The truest inward fast is abstinence from evil in thought and word and deed. Such is the perpetual duty of the real Christian. And doubtless, under wise counsel, the abstinence from certain food and drink LENT. 169

may in some cases assist in this, as we read of Christ saying of the deaf and dumb spirit, "This kind goeth not forth but by prayer and fasting." But this fasting must be wisely practised, or it brings other worse spirits in its train, as the spirits of arrogance and presumption, the Satans and Lucifers of the soul; and even covetousness and lust, Mammon and Belial, may have to do with such fasting, unless we watch and ward carefully the spiritual gates of our beings. True fast, doubtless, may be kept for the betterment of our And yet there may be a more excellent way, one safer and surer, the abstinence from evil, the sorrow for sin, the baptism of repentance, the amendment of life. Such a state being attained by the spirit. it will regulate its body in temperance, soberness and It will exercise a stewardship over material chastity. means, founded upon the sacred principle of self-sacri-Those who fast in this spirit will abstain themselves that they may bestow on others, and this is the right social fruit of individual fasting. It is thus the prophet declares from God, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thy own flesh?"

Let us determine thus truly to fast. As individuals, let us abstain from all evil in thought and desire, for

therein is that which issues in word and deed. As social beings, let us fast that others may feast, that we may have to bestow upon others. As disciples of Christ, let us abstain from all appearance of evil, that our lives may be examples to our fellows in the faith, and to the practically heathen population around us. Let us fast from all sin and wickedness, for these are our great enemies; and especially, as Christians, let us fast from all revengeful feelings against those who, like Christ's crucifiers, know not what they do. Thus let us keep our Lent.

XI.—DETERMINATION IN DUTY.

T is one thing to have a conviction of conscience suddenly moving our beings, a suggestion of that which is right appealing to the mind, a momentary inspiration of duty; and another to have a life-long sense of rectitude, an abiding determination to adhere to the true and good and self-sacrificing, the ever-constant, resolute will to do and dare and suffer in the righteous cause, the conviction that duty must be obeyed whatever destiny it leads to, which our glorious Lord and Leader had when "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem."

The steadfastness of our Lord's character is most remarkable. Conscious of his vocation to realize the idea of the kingdom of God, our Lord steadfastly adhered to it. As to this central work, there was no variation of his faith from the beginning to the end of his ministry, whatever may have been the difference between his earlier and later views of his relationship to the Gentiles and of the authority of the Law of Moses. He was called, he believed, to be the Redeemer

of mankind, not in the sense of a political leader, but of a moral Reformer or Saviour from sin. Such, he held, was the true idea of the Messiah—the right understanding of all the prophecies of his nation respecting him. Such was the character which he aspired to fulfil, and to this view of it he adhered throughout his life.

The power of God sustained our Lord in his steadfast course, as it will sustain us if we ask for it aright; and the steadfastness of Christ can be imitated by us, and is required from us. It was not sufficient with our Lord that his disciples believed on him when he personally spoke to them. He required not only momentary consent, but steadfastness of faith. To the many who "believed on him," he said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." We need that which was in old times called "the perseverance of the saints." Our whole course should be true and generous, for our Lord went continually about doing good. Nor should we do things by halves when we set about them. That which our hand findeth to do, we should do with all our soul and might. Our effort should be earnest - our work thorough. The mission of our Lord was no course of compromise with the world, nor should ours be. A life-long continuance in well-doing is the pattern which he has placed before No mere gusts of good feeling are sufficient to bear on the bark of life to its desired haven.

must be a continuous, steady wind, and one blowing in the right direction, to do that. An unswerving steadfastness of purpose is the example which our Lord exhibits to us.

XII.—SUBMISSION TO DESTINY.

HE determinations of duty must harmonize with a submission to destiny. The face must be steadfastly set towards Jerusalem, although

Calvary be there. And there are many lesser Jerusalems and lesser Calvaries than those of our Lord, lesser duties that we have to go through, and lesser destinies to face, which are yet tasks and trials enough for our poor weak spirits. Two cups may be filled full, although one shall be greater and one less. Yet, surely we can drink our little cup, however bitter the draught be in it, far better because our Lord drank his large one, so meekly, so patiently, so devotedly. He took it when it was given into his hands and quaffed it, not dwelling on its bitterness, and we should do so with the cups which duty and destiny present to us. We have to think of duty first, and let destiny follow. We have no business to calculate consequences, but should do that which is right, and leave the results in His hands who does all things for the best, who sends us clear shining after rain, and often glorifies in the end that which at first seemed darkness and disaster. A defeat may be better than a victory, a reverse more really beneficial to us than a success. Such certainly will be the case if we are driven back by it to truer, although humbler, principles of action. The cross which Christ went forth to meet at Jerusalem was a more glorious symbol in the end than any earthly crown which could have been offered him there.

The determination to fulfil duty is a submission to destiny in its highest sense of a voluntary obedience to God. O let us be decided and firm in that which we believe to be our right course in any matter! The greater includes the less, but it is as well to be right in a lesser as in a greater thing, for the less makes up the greater. It is of the highest importance that our poor, weak, wavering wills should be increased and strengthened, that we should be firmer in character, more steadfast in our obedience to Duty as the representative of God, less timid in meeting our destiny in submission to Him. And to assist us in this, it is well to remember how steadfastly Christ set his face to go to Jerusalem, although suffering and death awaited him there.

Let us not less obey the teaching of God because it comes to us in no such exalted form, with no such striking majesty, as it came to our Lord. Rather let the knowledge of his great duties comfort us in our little ones, and strengthen us to perform them. Rather

let the knowledge of his great sufferings, which he foresaw so long and so distinctly before they came to pass, console us in our light troubles and trials, many of which before they occur are mercifully hidden from our eyes. Truly has our Lord borne our griefs and endured our sorrows, and truly will he prove to us sanctification and redemption, if we will but follow in his steps.

XIII.—PRAYERFULNESS OF CHRIST.

SUR Lord commends himself greatly to us when he appears in the attitude of prayer. never more truly our exemplar than when he is praying to God. The earnestness of his spirit then most largely shews itself. The communion of his soul is so intimate with the Father of spirits, that it increases our own assurance of His existence. His spirit of aspiration inspires our souls to rise into communion with God. We feel more fully that there is an Hearer and Answerer of prayer when we listen to his trusting tones, when we hearken to his earnest supplications, when our minds dwell upon the utterances of devotion which his addresses to his Heavenly Father bring to our Conscious of being ever heard by the Divine Parent, the sense of prayerfulness was the continuous manifestation of his spiritual life. He was ever lifting up his soul to the Father who seeth and heareth in secret. He was instant in prayer—always ready to ask of the Great Source of all life, more light, more faith, more power. He prayed without ceasing-ever possessing the desire of being nearer to God, of being more submissive to His will, of living in greater harmony with the order of His providence.

In the spirit of Christ's prayerfulness our souls should continuously abide. It is in that spirit that our souls can best join themselves with our Lord. When the spirit of prayerfulness fills our souls, when we long for light to flow into them from the high and holy spheres, when we desire for love to warm our breasts with more sacred fire, when we earnestly yearn for the possession of more power, through which to be good and do good, then we have attained to the mind of Christ, and are one with him in that state of the soul which opens itself to receive the gifts of God, which reaches itself forth for His help, and holds out a cup for Him to fill. We are most fully in communion with Christ when the spirit of prayerfulness which we have in common with him is in entire submission to God's holy will, when we are ready to withdraw our petitions the moment we conceive they may contravene His purposes, when our desires are thoroughly in harmony with His providence, and our wishes in complete accordance with His holy laws.

It is in the union of the human with the Divine will that prayer obtains its highest and most powerful speech. It is in resignation to God's will and in the active service of His providence that prayer gains its final answer. The true spirit of prayer is a desire that

God's light may shine, that God's love may warm, and God's perfect will be done. It is answered by more wisdom, by greater benevolence, by a wider ability in all goodness. Its desires ascend in faith, in trust, in love; and its answers return in hope, in confidence, in resignation, in a sense of peace and rest which nothing can disturb, in a spirit of harmony with the universal order of things, and of thorough co-operation with the Divine will.

In the true prayer, there is the faith without which it is impossible to please God, through which those who come unto Him must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them who diligently seek Him. There is the sense of human weakness, as soon as felt yielded up and banished from the mind. And there is the spirit of resignation to God's holy will, the surrender of the human to the Divine, the submission of the soul to God.

To teach us our filial relationship to God, and to harmonize our wills with the Divine will, was the mission of Christ. His spirit was one of submission to Divine Will, to Divine Law, to Divine Providence. He was resigned to suffer, that his self-sacrifice might be an example to others. He overcame his human weakness, to shew us how we must harmonize our wills with the will of God. Not for ourselves alone do we live, nor for ourselves alone suffer. The spiritual, like the material, universe is connected together,

and when touched in any part there is vibration over the universal frame. We should be content to be made of service to others by the workings of Divine Providence. We shall find ourselves most truly, when we have given up ourselves for the good of others. desire to merge our wills in the Divine will, is the completion and end of all prayer, and the finish and perfection of all life. We must not quarrel with the stars, nor ask them to grant us gifts, but delight our souls in the bright and harmonious order of their watches. Are care and trouble, adversity and affliction, amid our earthly lot?—as far as they flow from our own conduct, from the deeds of our ancestors. from our political condition or our social state, we must endeavour to get rid of them; but inasmuch as they are in the order of Divine Providence, we must bear them resignedly. Were we otherwise than we are, were all human will one with the Divine will, these adverse things would not exist; for the ruling will of the Creator is, that bliss, and not suffering, should be the lot of His creatures.

May we behold in the life of our Lord the great teaching, that we should submit our wills to God's will, and let it be the great object of our prayers that we may be enabled to do this! Prayer and resignation will thus be harmonized, and earth raised nearer to heaven.

XIV.—THE HELP OF GOD.

we able to drink of the cup which he drank of, and to be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with? Do we say, like those early disciples of our Lord, We are able? Let us review the matter. The forms of things, their colours, their shape, their grouping, still exist amid the night and darkness, but it is the beams of day that bring them into light and knowledge.

Can we say, with Christ, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee"? If we are true Christians, who live and worship as Christ lived and worshipped, we can. To acknowledge God's fatherhood is in a sense prayer to Him, for it places us in the position of His dependent children. To acknowledge His infinite power, is to cast ourselves before Him in a spirit of prayerfulness. All things are possible to God—to give the cup or to withhold it, to save us from it, or to enable us to bear it.

Our lives are cups which are filled more or less, as God wills, with duties and responsibilities, cares and temptations, trials and adversities. He who gives the duty can supply the power to perform it. He who places upon us the responsibility can furnish the strength to bear it. He who renders us liable to cares, cares for us in them. He who permits temptation will not allow us to be tempted more than we are able.

O we have an almighty Friend-an all-powerful Protector! Our God can do more for us than we can conceive or hope. O how strong is His love-how infinite His providence! Our short span of life on this earth cannot limit His power or circumscribe His grace. Cannot our souls rejoice in the possibilities of God? Is it not a source of everlasting trust for us that there is One Almighty Governor of the universe, who in the end will rectify all wrong, remove all error, dispel all doubt, heal all suffering, and subdue all things to Himself? And as we believe He is one and almighty, this we feel He must in the end accomplish. The clouds are dark, but His sun will shine forth. He will not leave us or forsake us. The possibilities of the universe are infinite, and God is in the midst of it and throughout it. We cannot, if we would, flee away from Him He will at length offer us some cup which we shall recognize as coming from His fatherly hand. His providences will find us at the uttermost ends of the earth; and night and the grave cannot hide us

from His love. To recognize the possibilities of His power is a consolation amid all the ills of life.

O we suffer from sin—it distracts us, it renders us wretched; we are ashamed of ourselves, we are cursed by our consciences; but there is a power above that of sin, the mere thought of which, if we entertain it, will help us—a power that can subdue sin—the mighty power of God. The temptation is strong—it is winning, it is mastering us; but in a moment, if we ask it rightly, God's help will resist it, drive it away, cast it out from us. O may we make this experience of prayer, and grow in the knowledge of the resistless might of God!

Do we see vice flourish for a season? Wait; and we shall behold some law of God, sharp as a two-edged sword, cut it down and lay it low, no more to decry the ways of providence. Is villany triumphant? Does injustice rule? Has the tyrant his heel upon the bleeding corpse of a nation? Do impious men think to consecrate slavery by force of arms? Do deceitful priests, lost to all sense of honour and truthfulness, appear before their people with lies in their right hands? Be not dismayed—the corrupt has but a short season—its life is decay, and it is bound to perish—God will bring to light the acts of darkness; God will knock off the shackles that enslave; God will raise the hero who shall free the country; God will inspire the apostle who shall be filled with the spirit of truth

wherewith to overcome the spirit of error, and who shall comfort and enlighten the people! The devout recognition of the almighty power of God should support and console us in the midst of all transient evil and error, and elevate us above the fear or care of all merely temporal things.

XV.—THE CUP OF CHRIST.

E are human beings—poor, imperfect creatures at the best, often weak, often failing, often going wrong, often backsliding. Our Lord himself had this human imperfectness—possessed this sense of human weakness. He knew that with God all things were possible, but he prayed that if it were possible God would remove his cup of suffering from His language is not philosophically correct, but that which he intended to express was the sense of his human weakness and the consciousness that, although God was almighty, only that which was right would ever be willed by Him. He foresaw but one end to his earthly course, that he must drain the cup of suffering to the bitterest dregs of death, and in the view of such pain and anguish his human weakness pressed upon him. Probably, if we judge of his organization by his spirit, he was peculiarly sensitive to physical pain. His sympathetic nature seems to imply this. Many, whose characters are of a similar class to our Lord's, have been intensely susceptible to corporcal suffering. We cannot wonder that he felt momentary shrinkings from such a cruel death as awaited him. That feeling them, he conquered them, is greater than if he had not felt them. Even with the dread in his spirit, he knew it would not be possible, unless it were right, that the cup of suffering should pass from him.

O that we would more feel this! Unless it were possible with God, or right in His eyes, we should not pray that any cup of affliction should pass from us. We cannot altogether judge of the uses of adversity. We must leave Him to decide for us. He who has made even night and darkness His angels, and given them beneficent missions for us, has also for His angels, trial and suffering, calamity and affliction, pain and death. O could we but recognize them as His ministering spirits, half of their gloom would be removed, half the throes they give us would be assuaged! desired only that which was right to be possible, from what a multitude of tormenting wishes should we be saved! How would our prayer be simplified! intensity would it gain from this simplicity! sense of our human weakness would be lost in our consciousness of divine strength. If we were to leave things to God, prayer would be merged in resignation.

Such is the example which our Lord gives us. Though the flesh was weak with him, the spirit was truly willing. Though he prayed that if it were possible the hour and the cup should pass from him, he

knew the meaning of divine possibility, that it never was exercised beyond the sphere of right, and he was enabled to add, "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt."

O that we could make this conclusion of our Saviour's prayer the spirit of our lives! Were each human will submitted to the Divine will, what peace of conscience, what moral harmony, what a sense of rest and trust and surety, would exist in humanity! There would be no more wrestling of flesh and spirit, no more war among our members leading to other wars, no more discord in the conscience, no more anarchy of the passions, no more painful convictions of sin, or abiding unhappiness allowing no peace to the heart. The example of the cup of Christ would not then be lost upon us, but our sense of weakness be swallowed up in our trust in the Divine help.

XVI.—VIGILS WITH CHRIST.

from the lips of the Christ. Mankind forbade it. God forbade it. The Son of Man in Jesus shrank from his destiny, but the Son of God in him was ready to be offered up in sacrifice for the truth. The spirit of weakness was felt, but the spirit of Sonship conquered. Thus our Lord, after praying that if possible the cup of his suffering might pass from him, added, "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt." And then, at this stage of his agony, he found how little human sympathy could avail him.

His disciples slept. Could they not watch with him one hour, not even Peter, in the time of his so great agony? One hour—when he endured such ages of suffering! It is sad indeed, this failure of human sympathy. O how weak and failing is the sympathy we have for others, even for the Christ! The knowledge of this should humble us. One hour only, not to be able to watch with him, who had such love, such forethought, such watchfulness, for his disciples, such

watchfulness for us! And with such need as they had, and as we have, to watch and pray, lest there be a falling into temptation! O how weak are human beings of themselves!—how the senses dominate over the spirit!—how do the best among us slumber when near the hour of crisis—during that one hour, in which for us so much is impending!

Yet let us regard, even with respect to this instance of human fallibility, the truthful charity of our Lord. He recognized the necessary weakness of human spirits garmented in poor mortal bodies. The spirit, he declared, was willing, but the flesh was weak. And so it is often with us; and in the charity of Christ here, we have reason to be grateful that we have revealed to us the pardoning love and mercy of God. Weak is human sympathy and great is human infirmity, but God is the strength and hope of us all. Let us watch and pray, however failing is the flesh, with willing spirits, lest we enter into temptation.

XVII.—GOOD FRIDAY.

morative services to recall our minds to the great fact of our redemption, as it is connected with the crucifixion of our Lord, should be so seldom celebrated by our churches, or, when held, so little honoured in their observance.

We cannot on this day think too highly of the value of that service which the cross of Christ has rendered to the world. Had it not been for that crowning act of self-sacrifice, we might not only have been worshipping idols of wood and stone, of gold and silver, but adoring in our inmost hearts the imperfect ideas and evil passions which they represent. And where then would have been those gentle martyrs and benevolent philanthropists who, moved by the glory of the cross of Christ and touched by the character of his sacrifice, have emulated his example, and thought it not too great a price to give their lives for the cause of truth and faithfulness to religion; who have sacrificed their time and talents to the dissemination of knowledge,

the education of the young, the relief of the poor, the assistance of the distressed, the aid of the tempted or the solace of the suffering? Where would these ministers of self-sacrifice have been—who would have called them forth—who would have consecrated them for their work—had it not been for that perfect oblation of self-sacrifice which our Lord, as our great Highpriest, offered upon the cross?

Yet, although nominally Christian, we have all a Pagan as well as a Christian element in our souls—a selfish as well as a self-sacrificing side to our natures. How romantic and silly seems self-sacrifice to the man of the world! Time is money with the great multitude, and except for money it cannot be given. Why should a man neglect his own interest for the sake of others? says the prudence of the world. each one attended in the best way to his own affairs, the welfare of society would be best served, says the wisdom of the world. And there is truth of its kind in the Savings' Bank and in political economy, but not all truth, and not the highest truth. bearably proud would this world of ours become, were there not some few brave men raised up from time to time to despise and criticise it! How blear-eyed and short-sighted it would grow, were it not for the frenzyrolling eye of the poet, the tranced eyeballs of the seer, or the dreamy vision of some Joseph or other! How selfish it would get, did not some St. Martin

divide his cloak with the beggar—some Garrison start his newspaper upon a penny roll and pint of milk a-day—some Florence Nightingale shew us how to tend the sick and comfort the dying!

And this world would not be worth living in, or fit to live in, if there were not such lights as these to enlighten its darkness. And how were their rays derived? From the light that crowned the cross of Christ. Thence came St. Martin's pity and disinterestedness. Thence came Garrison's self-sacrifice and love of the slave, "no more as a slave, but as a brother beloved." Thence came Miss Nightingale's labour of love in the wards of pain and fever and death. Such a power of God has the cross of Christ possessed in raising up not only apostles and martyrs, but doers of good to mankind.

And how does it act and manifest the power of God? Everything that has not a clearly selfish purpose is misconceived by the man of the world, and all disinterested action runs counter to his theory of life and experience of mankind. The Pagan element in him cries out for self-indulgence, and thus covetousness is idolatry, and the evil principle is represented as the god of this world. To such the teaching of self-sacrifice, derived from the cross of Christ, is assuredly foolishness; and to be saved from so gross and injurious an idea may be termed truly, a great salvation! Sad indeed is the state of all, whether Pagan

or nominally Christian, who make idols of themselves, worshipping their own appetites and evil passions, deifying their own pomp and wealth and station, unmoved by a disinterested thought, uninspired by a generous feeling, unattracted by the cross of Christ, and unredeemed by that holy spirit of self-sacrifice which he shewed forth thereon as the Saviour of the world.

XVIII.—THE DOCTRINE OF THE CROSS.

HE practice of self-denial and the significance of the cross of Christ are indissolubly connected together. The teaching of self-sacrifice is the doctrine of the Cross. To follow Jesus we must deny ourselves and take up our cross, as he bore his throughout his life and to his glorious death.

We have the doctrine of the cross exemplified throughout the life of our Lord. He bore the material cross only a part of the way on the road to his crucifixion, but he bore the spiritual cross throughout the entire course of his life-long service to God and labours for mankind. And he taught the doctrine of the cross before he was nailed upon the fatal timber of Calvary. He taught his disciples that they must expect ignominy, of which the cross was the extremest symbol, if they would be true to the spirit of his life and teaching. They must be prepared to deny themselves, to relinquish their desire of being respected and applauded by others, to give up their love of social ease and material comfort, to employ their time in acts of duty

to God and works of service to mankind, to bend down their passions at the control of virtue, to give up their desires at the dictation of conscience, utterly to resign their self-willedness to the holy will of God, no more to do what they liked to do, but to do what they ought to do—if they would take up their cross and follow him.

And what our Lord taught, he exemplified. a course of self-denial did his utter absorption in the work of his ministry imply! Alienation from his family, with the exception of his mother-Blessed among women !-his father being the dimmest possible figure in his history, and his brothers disbelieving and deriding him, followed the announcement of his mission, and continued, as far as we can judge by our records, to its close. To his neighbours he was first an occasion of wonder, and then of obloquy, persecution and horror, as his truths appeared to them first novelties and then blasphemies. The esteemed among his fellow-countrymen, the wealthy, the learned, the religious, the high in office, the deep in Old-Testament studies, were his most determined enemies. chiefly the poor and illiterate who gave any attention to his teachings, and they generally followed him either to seek signs or obtain cures. Except when he retired to solitary places to pray, or when he was overcome by fatigue, as on the occasion when he sat weary by the patriarch's well, he had no rest from his labours of wandering and teaching. He saw rich bales of goods filling the bazaars, and long caravans laden with the precious products of the world pass him by, and their merchants enriching themselves with the wealth and luxuries of the earth, and he travelled on in his bare raiment, preaching spiritual riches and the treasures of another life. He beheld men rise to station and power and fame, and crowds waiting at their gates to ask their judgment and listen to their advice, and lowly salaams made to them in the market-places and temple-courts, until foreheads touched the dust; and he went on resigning station and power and fame, and teaching-"Call no man Master upon earth, for one is your Master in heaven." He heard the reverence with which men spake of Rabbi Ben Baruch or Rabbi Ben Ezra, how edifying was the commentary of the one upon the Torah, or how gracious was the other's exposition of the Book of Daniel, and he went on declaring, "It was said by them of old time * * * but I say unto you," speaking his own new truths in his own new words, and hurling such hard sayings against the Scribes and Pharisees as shall cling to them for ever. And thus he denied himself wealth and station and repute, and bore his cross of ignominy through life, until he was borne himself upon the cross of Calvary. But before this, what inward crosses had he to bear: what desire for ease, what inclination to enjoy, what incentives to love and to be loved, what temptations

to follow the pleasant and wilful rather than the hard and duteous, had he to overcome!

How often must our Lord have been heart-sore and soul-sick and life-weary before his great agony in the garden and his expiring cries on Calvary! And yet he loved nature, at once with the love of a poet of men and of a priest of God-not only read its revelations, but loved it for its own sake. He saw the sower go forth with his seed, and interpreted that lesson, and the lesson of the ruddy sky of morning and the lowering clouds of evening; but he loved the heavens in their changeful loveliness, and the earth in its varied garments of verdure and blossom, as a son of beautiful Galilee ought to have loved them, because they were so lovely; and terribly hard must have appeared to him the fate that took him, from his beautiful native scenes, amid the animal offal and human hypocrisy which he met with in the temple-courts of priestridden Jerusalem; and cruel the destiny which at length tore him violently away from the light of earthly life for ever.

O the dear sufferer upon the cross of Calvary, how strong was the will that led him there; what temptations did it put aside, what desires overcome, what natural weakness triumph over! O the poor lamb, that was there taken and slain, far from its sweet native pastures of green Galilee, what a piteous bleat went up to the ear of God from it; and yet its dim

eye must have turned inward to remembered times when the lily of the field was glorious in crimson, and the birds of the air brought song and gladness to the heart! And the sweet, dear, suffering life of Jesus at length passed away and was resumed by its Creator, to appear again in another form. And it was well; for all that life had before been given to Him—all its strength, all its spirit; all its grief, all its joy; all its days, all its timeless state—and now all its love, even of itself, was relinquished.

To yield up life to God, so taught the cross of Calvary. To employ all life in His service, and to relinquish it in that service, such was its teaching. This must be done by all who would truly call themselves Christ's disciples. They must deny themselves and follow him. To consecrate life to God and hallow to Him all that belongs to life, to deny our own wills and accept the Divine will, to live to God's greater glory and die into His higher light, is the true doctrine of the cross of Christ.

XIX.—BEARING OUR CROSS.

HERE were no virtue in self-denial unless it were for a good object, for a holy purpose. True self-denial is synonymous with consecration to God and devotion to the holiest interests of humanity. Life and all that belongs to it should be

thus dedicated. We can yield our lives to God's service after the example of Christ without suffering

physical martyrdom.

All that belongs to life, its time, its strength, its talents, its means, can be consecrated by self-denial. Daily should we take up our cross and Its time! follow Jesus, employing our lives in works of piety and philanthropy, devoting our hours and days and years to the worship of the All-Perfect and the perfection of His erring creatures, ourselves being included in that long list. Its strength! All the best powers of our life should be devoted in imitation of him who went constantly about doing good. We should struggle continually against our weariness in well-doing, in the blessed faith that we shall reap if we faint not.

We should bear our cross bravely, despising the shame, and labour on patiently, although we see no rewards for our labour, no trophies of our achievements, no fruits of our toil. Its talents! Whatever capacity we have of intellect or skill, should be consecrated to God's service. In faithful following of Christ we should distribute the light, we should diffuse the truth, that we possess to those around us. Each one can do something in enlightening others, in impressing the idea of duty upon their souls, in elucidating the ways of Providence to their minds. We should not selfishly enjoy the knowledge we gain, but we should deny ourselves to spread that knowledge around, and for the sake of truth be ready to take up the cross of reproach and persecution. Its means! Whether little or large, they should be offered up in a spirit of joyful sacrifice. Life affords to all some opportunities of this kind. The means of wealth should be applied for His sake and to carry out His will who is the real owner of them. And if we do not possess these, we have other means which can serve similar purposes. Passing over time and strength and talents, there are station, position and age. We can deny ourselves of the pride of station to make use of its opportunities. There are few who do not hold some position which may enable them to become benefactors to others, as neighbours and friends, or as visitors of the afflicted and consolers of the troubled. And our age may enable us to direct

those younger than ourselves. We can influence them, counsel them, give them the benefit of our advice and the advantage of our experience.

By daily self-denial and devotion of our time and talents to God, we can take up the cross of Christ, and, following in his holy steps, become redeemers of our species from vicious inclinations and degrading pursuits, leading them to paths of virtue and true happiness, and saving them from the fierce assaults of temptation and the pains of conscious guilt and evergnawing remorse. And if we thus deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow Jesus, the great sacrifice of Calvary, as far as we are concerned, will not have been made in vain. Others may turn it into a mysterious dogma. We shall make it a lesson for our lives. Others may theorize about its nature. We shall partake of its spirit. Others may frame it in a creed and preach it. We shall insert it in our lives and practise it.

Although, likewise, we have not to follow our Lord in the manner of his death, for persecution has had its claws clipped and its fangs drawn, we have to follow him in its spirit. Upon the bed of death, when all is hush and quiet around, an inward conflict may be raging, and that conflict can only be subdued by the possession within our souls of the self-sacrificing spirit of Jesus at the last hour. We can then as truly die upon the cross of self-denial, as our Lord died upon it

For us, as for our Lord, the work of our lives may be thus finished, completed, perfected. With Paul's soldier of faith, we may have fought a good fight and finished our course, and have a crown laid up in heaven for us. With our Lord, we may be enabled to exclaim, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." The last thing that we have to sacrifice is the love of life itself. That was Christ's cross upon the cross, and it is ours. And when the mortal hour arrives, and until then we have to prepare ourselves for it, may his sweet spirit of resignation, may his holy spirit of self-sacrifice, be ours also! And then we shall die into the fresher life, with new opportunities, with new advantages; we shall die into the higher light, with brighter capacities, with clearer knowledge; we shall die into the fuller love, with purer instincts, with warmer affections, with a holier bliss.

XX.—MOURNING FOR CHRIST.

SS they approached the place of the Skull, our Lord met some women of the city, bewailing and lamenting him after the manner of the

East, and turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children." Unselfish even upon the sorrowful way, unselfish with the cross on which he should suffer his last mortal agony borne before him, he thought of the woes impending over others, and not of his own, and could not help prophesying the terrible judgment which should befall his country. If they did those things in the green wood, what would be done in the dry? If his countrymen unjustly crucified him, what would they go on to do of injustice and cruelty? Their evil would grow with age; the withered hand of time would fill up the cup of their iniquity to overflowing. They would proceed from bad to worse, and ultimately perish as a nation—as they have done.

Applying to ourselves Christ's teaching on the way

to the place of his death, have not we, like the daughters of Jerusalem, more reason to sorrow for ourselves than to weep for Christ? Of Christ's glory on earth and in heaven, we are sure. Of his present bliss and honour at the right hand of the Father, we feel confident. But should we not mourn for our own unfaithfulness to him, for our own faint wills and weak endeavours after righteousness, for the troubles which impend over us nationally, for the personal sinfulness and national injustice which so largely prevail through the world? Or should we not more strictly follow his spirit, although not his word, by weeping not for ourselves, nor for him, but for others who perish in ignorance, who are dead in sin, who go groping out of life into the terrible darkness? If unfaithful to Christ now, what may we become? Is it not well to see here a warning against the beginnings of evil? If we do wrong in the green wood, what may we do in the dry? If in the green wood of our youth we neglect the means to promote the growth of virtue, how stunted and rotten will the dry wood of our age become! When our wood is green and tender, let us not abuse it; when a tender feeling for others inspires our spirits, let us not check it; let us not mar any such green wood of the soul, but cherish our youthful love of virtue, nourish our early trust in mankind, cling to the first pure feelings of faith in goodness, and hold fast to our hearts the tender, sympathizing, compassionate thought for others, the youthful aspiration after truth and honour and chivalry and fair renown, the pristine love of virtue for its own sake, of nature for her sweet beauty, of all things pure and simple, innocent and good. Otherwise, how dry and withered will the wood of our lives become, knotted into all shapes of hardness of heart, contorted into all forms of suspicion, rotten to the core with selfish vice and sinfulness; decayed unto death; and such a death, not like that of our Lord, a death of suffering but of voluntary sacrifice, a death of ignominy in the eyes of the vulgar many but of glory to the vision of the noble few, a dying into everlasting life and unutterable bliss; but a death mean and poor and sad indeed, a death at the period of which all that was worthy of life had long since been dead, a death of the body after the conscience had perished and the wisdom of thought vanished away; a death of the body around which the wings of faith no longer waved, when hope itself was dead, and all was blight and cloud and desolation; a dying out into involving gloom and infinite darkness! O God, preserve us from such a death as this!

In reference to the spirit of our Lord's death, not of course to its form, for that was God's appointment, while its spirit is for our culture and example, we may well exclaim, "Let our last end be like his!" Not so much to mourn over its occurrence, as to strive to

become possessed of its spirit, should be our desire. The spirit of the life and death of Christ harmonize and illustrate each other. That our Lord in the midst of his anguish upon the cross should have momentarily given way, simply proves his humanity, and makes the imitation of his example more clearly possible for During a sharper throe of spiritual anguish or bodily agony, that cry of utter desolation escaped the mouth of the Crucified, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"—but the faith of the Anointed regained its strength; he knew he was not deserted by his God, he was not forsaken by his Father; "and Jesus cried with a loud voice and said. Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit; and having thus said, he breathed his last." It was expedient for us that he should go away. Let us not mourn for him, but desire to be where he is.

XXI.—CONFORMITY TO CHRIST.

O obtain the spirit of the death of Christ, we must possess the spirit of his life. It is obvious that we cannot be required to imitate our Lord's example in every detail, as our different circumstances would necessarily preclude our doing this. His particular actions were called forth by his peculiar position and surroundings. It is sufficient that we imitate the spirit of his life and character.

So with regard to his death. We are not likely to be called upon to make that bitter experience of death which he made. We shall in every probability breathe our last in circumstances very different from his, not extended in mortal agony upon a cross of shame, but sighing our souls away in the ears of listening friends. Yet, although there is a different mortal lot before us, it should not be received in a different spirit from his. As in our lives we have a different part to act, and yet our lives should be lived in his spirit, so, although the accidents of our death are different, our mortal fate should be contemplated in the same spirit. Praying

forgiveness, as our Lord did with regard to his enemies, for those who have injured us, on the plea of their ignorance which he urged; relinquishing, in his spirit, our wills to the will of God; commending our friends, as he did his, to the care and keeping of each other; committing our spirits in perfect trust into the hands of the Heavenly Father; we should pass away from earthly life in the spirit in which our Lord passed away from it-forgiving our enemies, loving our friends, and trusting in our God. The redeemed are able to follow the example of the Redeemer. The servant can imitate the character of his Master and take pattern from his excellences. The disciples of the Saviour can continue his work of salvation; and all Christians should partake of the spirit of the life and of the death of their Lord.

Our Lord prayed for his enemies upon the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." We are prompt to recognize the beauty of this; but is it not imitable? Cannot we possess the same compassionate and forgiving spirit? Should not our lives be made conformable through this spirit to his death? If we are not living in the same loving and sympathizing spirit in which he lived, how can we expect to die in the same compassionate and forgiving spirit in which he died? As the Apostle declares, unless we have the spirit of Christ, we are none of his. And so with regard to the final committal of the spirit

into the hands of God. Should the things of time be dearer to us than they were to our Lord? Should we value the world more than he valued it? Should we care for riches and honours and pleasures more than he cared for them? Should we have less belief than our Lord in the reality of a life beyond the grave? Can we be losers through imitating Christ by trusting in God alone? Have we not the same reasons that our Lord had for committing our future existence unreservedly into the hands of our Heavenly Father? Let the spirit of our lives, then, be made conformable to the spirit of the death of our Saviour.

XXII.—COMMENDING THE SPIRIT TO GOD.

circumstances through which we pass—obedience to the Divine law in its varied moral enactments—subordination to the Divine discipline in the joys and sorrows, prosperities and adversities which chequer our lot—resignation to the Divine Providence in all changes of our beings or transits of our souls—such should be the spirit of our lives. Not our will, but God's will. Let this thought penetrate our lives. Let it succour us and give us strength when we are tempted. Let it help us and calm us when we are tried. Let it console us and wipe away our tears when we are in sorrow. Let it yield us patience and resignation under trouble and affliction. Let it attend us at the hour of death.

Thus, like Christ upon the cross, we shall be enabled with all holy trust and confidence to commend our spirits into the hands of our Heavenly Father. From whom our spirits came we know, but whence they came we know not. "The wind bloweth where

it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but we cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Our spirits are breaths of God. He hath given forth and He can resume. The final death-words of our Lord teach us to commend our spirits into His hands as unto the care of a merciful and almighty Preserver. His arm is not shortened that it cannot help, nor His hand weakened that it cannot save. His mercy is over all His works, and He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should be brought to everlasting life. His goodness is eternal and His providence omnipotent. In the arrangements of His grace and wisdom, all may securely Whenever the death-hour strikes for us, may we be enabled to exclaim, with our Lord, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!"

We know not exactly to what place we shall go when we depart hence. We know not the locality of heaven or the sphere of paradise; but we know that we go to God, that we shall still remain subjects of His government, children of our Heavenly Father's love, citizens of His universe, people of His dominions, heirs of His everlasting mercy and compassion, of His eternal favour and solicitude. But although we know not exactly where we shall go, for in our Father's house there are many mansions, we know where we should desire to go. We should desire to be where Christ is, at the right hand of God. That is the fitting

future habitation for Christ's true disciples. And that we may attain to that blessed sphere should be our earnest prayer and effort; and with this glorious object in view, we should most zealously and persistently endeavour to conform the spirit of our lives to the spirit of our Lord's death. So shall the cross of Christ become a true sign of our salvation. So shall the death of Christ become a life-giving power for us. So shall the blood of Christ wash the dark robes of our sinfulness white, until all is pure within us. So shall the cross of Christ be our banner of victory over sin and selfishness here, and our ensign of conquest over the grave and standard of immortal life hereafter.

XXIII.—EASTER SUNDAY.

MONG the festivals of our Church, none is more beautifully occupied than that which is dedicated to the commemoration of the Resurrection

Among the Sundays of the year, none is of Christ. more truly the day of our Lord than Easter Sunday. Compare this festal Sabbath with two other highdays of our Church. If on Good Friday we have celebrated Christ crucified, if we have now wept and now smiled through our tears over the cross of Jesus. how glorious is it on this day to know that our feelings of joy are unmixed with sorrow, that no gall of the grave is now mingled with the wine-cup of our communion with Christ, that the grave has lost its sting, that Death has lost his victory, that we no more die but sleep in the Lord, that the stone is rolled away from the sepulchre, that our visions of arisen saints have not been dreamed in vain, that the Angel of the Resurrection ever sits with burnished plumes by the empty tomb of Christ, that it ever sings to the ear of the soul, "He is not here, for he is risen," that we no

longer mourn Christ crucified, Christ who died for us, but rejoice in Christ arisen, in Christ the Resurrection and the Life!

On Christmas-day, the feast of the nativity of our Lord, we rejoice to celebrate the coming of Christ, to behold his star in the East, and wisely to follow its beams, and to mingle our hymns with the traditional strains of the angels upon his natal morn. Then, however, our joy is allied to a prospective sorrow. see before the young Christ the black mountain of temptation lowering gloomily; and in the distance the fond but bitter weeping over Jerusalem at the Mount of Olives—the traitor kiss of Judas—the scenes at Herod's court and Pilate's hall—the death—the doubt Not such is the view under the and the darkness. sun of Easter. At the feast of Christmas we celebrate Christ born into the body. At the Easter festival we commemorate his birth above the body—we rejoice in a greater birth than that of Jesus in the flesh—in the spiritual birth of his glorious resurrection. From this point of view, how infinitely joyous is the prospect to the believer! He who was before Rabbi, to Mary's faithful heart is now Rabboni. Our Lord had appeared to die. Yet death is but a seeming, for nothing really He has not died, but slept. He has not died, dies. but changed. He has awakened from his sleep, he has re-appeared living and glorified. "He is not here, for he is risen."

Is not this, then, the most joyous day of the year? Is it not the most gladdening festival of our Church? Life and immortality are brought to light by it. Through it the dead bones rise and knit together—an exceeding great army, as in the vision of Ezekiel. By a shaft of its sunshine, Death on the pale horse is stricken from his steed. Let us continue, then, to devote the day to its duty. Let us look through it upon Christ its Lord. Let us behold him in it as the Resurrection and the Life; and rejoice in the light of that immortality which, dim before, he has brightly revealed to us. Let us look up to our arisen Lord, from the life of death which is sin, to the life of righteousness which is life everlasting. Let us look up to him, from our mean policies, from our petty conventions, from all our doubt and darkness, in hope, in trust, in love. Let us look through him to the One Infinite Source of light and bliss and everlasting life.

XXIV.—THE NATURAL ANALOGY.

here. The death-like sleep of winter is over. The year with winter was laid like a corpse in its grave. Yet God embalmed it—God preserved it. The year has not died but slept, not died but been changed. Nature has arisen from its winter slumber, and appears again, shining and transfigured; rejoicing in its vernal resurrection, and decked in its fresh raiment of green and vestments of glory. The hard stoniness of winter is removed from the sodded sepulchre of nature, and the angel of spring, scattering flowers amid our paths, proclaims the annual renovation of the earth.

That bulb was buried in the dark ground. The frosts built it in with hard walls, and the storms raved wildly around it. None knew, except the Divine Gardener, but that it was dead and gone, but that the eyeless worm had eaten it, and it would be seen by men no more. Even the soft airs that swept around its earthy pillow mourned in strains of grief, like those

who lament for the beloved; or passed by it wondering, like those disciples who at first did not understand that their Lord would arise to them on the third day. As by a ladder of sunbeams, descended the angel of the resurrection from heaven. With a wand of rays it touched its tomb. With warm fingers of light it unsealed its sepulchre. Nature obeyed its God. The ground gaped, that the dead might be raised to life. The new life quickened. The bondage of its bulbous It cast off the cerements which body was burst. Its plumula, the sprout of its new life, covered it. tapered upward through the earth towards the light of day. It rises from its grave. It appears above the ground. Still slim and slender is its stalk. It seems to say, as with a tender voice, as Jesus said to Mary when he first appeared from the tomb, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended." It ascends, it swells, its leaves appear, and lo! at length, amid its delicate green, a snow-white blossom shews its chaste cup of purest beauty. Now may the sceptic no longer doubt. Now may Thomas no more disbelieve. The flower is known by its fairest face. We see that the buried has arisen. It may be examined and known. no longer too tender to be touched. Thomas may feel and handle. Its friends know their beloved flower by its fondly-remembered face, as the disciples recognized their risen Lord when he broke bread among them.

Nor is this all. That snow-white blossom is but

the first comer of a gathering assembly of flowers. All floral nature is in process of renovation. With the trumpet voice of spring sounding under ground, loosening frosted clod and crag and stone, there is resurrection after resurrection. One flower after another arises from its wintry grave to a new life and blossoming of loveliness. All vivid colours variate the woods and meadows of spring. Each follows in its order that first fairest blossom, robed in perfect white. One after another, each flower-bell rings its peal of happiness. One after another, each bud expands with golden beams of varied light and beauty, as one star differeth from another star in glory. And at length Nature is one Eden of blossom, one paradise of sweetness, one resurrection of loveliness and brilliancy.

Each flower, however, has arisen after its own order. Thus, likewise, in Christ, says the apostle, "shall all be made alive—Christ the first fruits; afterwards they which are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father."

There is beautiful harmony, perfect keeping, between the spring of Nature and the resurrection after Christ. In this manner Nature eloquently, although mutely, bears her witness to the truth. Especially should we listen to her voice at this sacred season, for through every spring-stalk which rises from its wintry tomb, through every vernal sprout which breaks the bonds of its bulbous body, through every blossom that shines upon the eye, she preaches to us of the resurrection.

"That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die, and that which thou sowest is not the body which will be born, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of one of the others, but God giveth it a body as He would, and to each of the seeds its own body. * * * So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

How beautiful it is to be reminded of the arising of Jesus when all Nature undergoes its annual resurrection, and Spring itself appears like an arisen spirit in its raiment of glory!

XXV.—THE HISTORICAL ARGUMENT.

R great historical fact was the resurrection of Christ to his immediate followers. All their hopes in him were at first dissipated by his death. Their dejection was complete. Had not Christ really arisen, this dejection would have extended into total apathy with respect to his mission. There would have been no apostles and evangelists, no disciples, no The resurrection and re-appearance of Christ to his followers was the only efficient cause which could arouse them to action. God benignantly permitted this manifestation of Christ in his immortal state to his disciples. They immediately arose themselves into the energetic spirit of a new moral life. They at once remembered the prophecies of their Lord, and recognized the spirituality of his kingdom. cording to their own unvarying asseverations and the unwritten traditions of the church, his resurrection was the foundation of their immovable faith in his truth. and in himself as the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, as well as of their steadfast hope of inheriting in his communion a state of everlasting life and of immortal bliss.

A great historical fact should the resurrection of Christ be to us. Unless we thus regard it, we cannot account for the diffusion and reception of Christianity; all history must become an enigma; all creation must be a moral chaos. With the resurrection of Christ admitted, all becomes clear. We can understand history. We can account for Christianity. We can behold in God a Moral Governor of the universe, whose holy rule will not allow delusion to triumph. We can ourselves receive in the resurrection of Christ a pledge of his promise of immortality, and a proof of existence beyond the grave.

Among the things which are above must be the wisdom from above of which St. James speaks, and which he directs us to seek if we be risen with Christ. This quickening of an elevated spiritual life within us is evidently thus spoken of by the apostle, because he founds it upon the fact of the resurrection of Christ. That great fact, under whatever conditions it had transpired, however it had been manifested to them, in whatever way it had been received by their minds, had so inspired the previously desponding apostles with faith and courage, that they boldly testified, in the face of danger and death, that the same Jesus whom the Jews had crucified, God had raised from the dead, and made him both Lord and Christ. Evidently they

were thus risen, raised, exalted in faith and spirit, by our Lord's resurrection, which through God's own way of communicating it to their minds had opened to them the gates of immortality, and given them a clear belief in a future state and a confident assurance of life everlasting. Not only the apostles, but the early disciples, were quickened by the knowledge of Christ's resurrection, as the martyrdom of the deacon Stephen most emphatically shews.; and the immediate consequence was a corresponding elevation of spirit and the quickening of a new moral life among them, which was manifested by devout assemblies and by holy lives.

Should not the fact of the resurrection of Christ also raise and exalt us into newness of life? In the view of an immortal life, what kind of persons ought we to become in all manner of life and conversation? Assuredly we ought to put away from us all that is low and degrading, all mean thoughts, all evil desires, For what can there be where all unholy actions. Christ is, but all that is good and true and pure and loving-what can there be at the right hand of God, but that which is Christ-like? In the light of the immortality which he has revealed to us, how poor and mean must all the pomp and wealth and pleasure of this world appear! A soul conscious of its immortality cannot sorrow as one without hope. A soul confident that there is an everlasting life reserved for it, must know that all the trials and adversities of the

present world are temporal and transitive. A soul raised by this faith above absorption in worldly care, antedates already the heavenly life, and has its hours even here devoted to God and to heaven. It is already by its faith in the society of the redeemed, among the communion of the saints, with the church triumphant, where Christ is at the right hand of God.

The apostle tells us truly, that if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. It is not sufficient to believe in Christ as a Moral Reformer: we must regard him also as the Resurrection and the Life. How should we be able to go on joyfully upon our mortal way without the bright belief in immortality which we have received through him? How great is the motive and encouragement which it gives the soul in its struggles to rise from the death of sin to the new life of righteousness! How should we be able to meet the trials and afflictions which occur to us without holding fast this blessed hope? How could we wait and toil on, if we had only hope in Christ here and none in Christ hereafter? How miserable would it be to think of entering upon the dim, unknown regions which lie beyond the boundaries of time, did we not believe that Infinite Love ruled there, and that we had an Immortal Friend to meet us upon its confines! Such is our faith and trust, our joy and confidence!

XXVI.—THE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE.

wisdom is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Christ himself is above, and let us strive to be Christ-like. The Father is in heaven, and let us endeavour to obey the precept of his Son, and to become perfect as He is perfect. Let us not forget that without holiness no man can see the Lord. As we aspire to be with Christ, let us qualify ourselves for such holy communion. Let us put away from us all that is contrary to his character, and more earnestly desire to appropriate its spirit, and to realize something of the intenseness of that faith whereby he declared, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

O let that faith animate us when the clouds are thick and black and troublous in our sky, and when the rains of sorrow descend! O let it animate us when, bowed down and weary with toil, we are ready to faint and cry out for rest! O let it animate us when we fear and despond, when the troubles of life are great, and when its years are few!

And let the angel of the resurrection sit beside our tombs, and let it tell us of the departed in Christ—"He is not here, for he is risen!"

And while desiring to be with our Lord, may we prepare ourselves to be with him, by seeking those things which are above, where he is, those things which even here are spiritual and heavenly.

Without the blessed faith in the resurrection of our Lord, our lot would be indeed wretched, the grave would be truly dark for us. To bury beneath the cold clod all our warm desires to live for ever, all our hopes to know more, and to serve God more truly,—all our aspirations after continued progress and ever-increasing light and virtue,—that would be a sad and wretched fate!

Thanks be to God, such is not our destiny! "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of those who rest." We have hope in our Lord, not only in the life that now is, but in the life that is to come. "And as we have borne the image of the earthly, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly." Immortality is the desire of our souls; immortality is the joy of our faith; immortality is the pledge and promise of the resurrection of our Lord!

XXVII.—ASCENSION-SUNDAY.

HEN the good are taken away from us, when those who have nourished us with knowledge, or cheered us by kindness, depart through the gate of death for the house of immortality, we weep for a season, and then we seek for good in the affliction, and confess that it was expedient that they should go away. However sainted were their paths here, they had done their duty in instructing and guiding us, and now it was well for us to exhibit selfreliance and work out our own salvation. Our fathers and mothers kindly guide our infant steps, teach us the truth as little children, lovingly tutor us in the right way. When, however, we become men, it is well that we should put away childish things; it is well that we should keep in the path of holiness by the exercise of our own wills. It is well to obey our parents when personally present, but it is even better that when absent their good influence should rule over us; and thus it is expedient for us that they go away.

As with our parents in the flesh, so with our parents

in the spirit, with our poet-prophets, with our patriot legislators. It is expedient for us that after awhile their personal power should give way to their spiritual influence over us. Unless they inspire even from the valleys of the dead, where is their inspiration? If we truly love our unseen Heavenly Father, and follow the precepts of our departed Teacher, of our ascended Lord; if, although he is absent from us at the right hand of the Father, the spirit of the Son is present in our souls, it has been expedient for us that Christ should have gone away.

The hymns of the prophet-bard must be honoured after his departure from earth. Not personal power, but spiritual influence and the immortality of his laws, is the desire of the true legislator. And so with our Lord. His service is perfect freedom. Had he remained with us in person, he might have enforced his commandments by a tone of his voice or a glance of his eye. But personal authority was not his object. He desired that a free and willing obedience should be rendered to God, as well in his absence as in his presence, and that his spirit, and not his person, should rule mankind.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, a cloud received him from the sight of the disciples. O let no cloud hide him from our sight! O let our hopes be fixed where he is! O let our affections ascend after him, until they are poured into the bosom of his Father and our Father, of his God and our God!

XXVIII.—WHIT-SUNDAY.

SHE Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit should become the spirit of holiness in The spirit of Christ is in a certain sense identical with the Spirit of God, as the spirit of a son should be identical with the spirit of his father, as the spirit of a messenger should be identical with the spirit of him who sends him, as the spirit of one who is anointed to an office should be identical with the spirit of him who anoints him to it. "Now, if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The spirit of our Lord's life and character should be the inspiration of our own. We should strive to regard God and mankind in the same devout and worshipping, loving and self-sacrificing disposition in which he regarded them. It is this, and this only, can constitute us Christians, and give us a thorough claim to the use of the Christian name.

If we do not possess the spirit of Christ, we should not say, "We are Christians"—much less should we presume to deny the name to others; we should only

say, "We desire to be Christians—we endeavour to be Christians." O that we may feel this more thoroughly! O that we could say sincerely and fervently, "I long after Christ, I long to grow like him, I long to have his spirit, his mind, the temper of his soul, the manner of his life!" O that we could as sincerely and fervently add, "I strive to attain to Christ. I endeavour after the Lord. I strive to love God as he loved Him, to worship God as he worshipped Him, to submit filially my will to the Divine Father as he submitted his will to Him. I endeavour to love mankind as he loved them, to work for their good as he worked, to give them knowledge as he gave it them, to redeem them from their sins as he redeemed them by calling them to virtue and to God, and to gain them for heaven as he gained them, by not only pointing out to them the road, but by leading them the way!" O that we could thus say, "We desire and strive in all things to possess the spirit of Christ!"

How often have we reason to exclaim, "How far are we, O Lord, from thee! How unlike are our spirits—so hard, so gross, so selfish—to thy spirit, so tender, so pure, so disinterested! How contrary is the spirit of our lives to thine in all that we think and feel and do!" Are we then Christians when this is the case? Ought we not to fear to dishonour that holy name by which we are called? Need have we that God should be gracious and merciful unto us.

XXIX.—THE DISPENSATION OF THE SPIRIT.

HERE is One God and none other than He—
even God our Father. There is unity over all
and through all for ever. God reveals Himself,
however, in various ways, and especially in three—
through Nature, through his Word, and through his
Spirit.

In the first religious development, God reveals Himself through Nature. Men look around upon the universe and see creation inscribed upon it, and recognize, although dimly, the operations of the Divine Hand. Fear is blended with wonder at this stage of religious development. God's voice is heard in the thunder, and His grace is but now and then known to gleam forth, as in the rainbow. This development includes the patriarchal and partly the Mosaic and prophetical dispensations. It closes by heralding in another development, through the manifestation of signs and wonders of a material character.

The second religious development corresponds with the idea of the Logos, or Word and Wisdom of God.



Its intention appears to be the intellectual education of humanity, which before had been sensibly instructed in the power of God through the first stage of development. Its first imperfect manifestation is the law given in cloud and tempest from Mount Sinai. Prophetic voices among mankind then proclaim the Divine decrees and judgments. Lastly in this development, Christ appears as the perfect speech of God's will, as the spiritual likeness of God, and as the example of that life of which God desired all humanity to partake. Thus is he called the Word of God, and as the word is that which proceeds from, he is also termed the Son of God. This stage, however, is chiefly an intellective epoch of faith and knowledge. Knowledge increases in it, but it requires more than even the highest teaching and example to obtain an entrance for truth into the life. In this stage, many are indeed called, but few chosen. Endeavours after belief and a desire to understand mysteries prevail. The epoch is considered final, and deifies itself in the person of its Great Representative, by this act apostatizing from his teachings, and preparing the way for its own dissolution.

The third religious development is that of the Holy Spirit, or direct influence of God upon the heart, which Christ predicted under the name of the Comforter, and of the Spirit of Truth which should lead to all truth. We have yet to expect it; for that it was manifested at Pentecost otherwise than in a temporary

and typical way and as a foretaste of good things to come, the past and present history of the Christian Church clearly contradicts. In this third stage of development which we have yet to expect, the chief characteristics, as we gather them from the promises of our Lord, appear to be, that Truth will be omnipresent, that Love will rule and regulate every detail of life, and that the Son himself will give up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. Individuals may already have realized this state in a measure, but it has yet to arrive for the universal church. As all things were created by the Father through his Word, so through his Holy Spirit of Love and Truth will all things find their consummation.

To the working of the Father through Nature, the elements of power, fear and wonder more especially correspond; to the working of the Father through His Word, those of humility, faith and knowledge; and to the working of the Father through His Holy Spirit, those of love, truth, joy and freedom. Our God is a living God. He is neither deaf nor dumb, but hears and speaks now as He did in the ancient times. O let us open our hearts to His Holy Spirit, that it may become the spirit of holiness in us!

XXX.—UNITY SUNDAY.

HAT a glorious day will that be for mankind when the Lord shall be King over all the earth, when there shall be one Lord and his name one! How sublime is that grand Hebrew idea of God as the one King of the earth, of the Divine Unity as ruling over the hearts of all men, and dictating the laws and regulating the destinies of nations!

When we reflect that in reference to our human affections we can only endow one being with our pure and perfect love; and although we ought to love all, in the sense of sympathizing with them and being merciful and kind to them and doing them service, this love is very different from that personally absorbing affection of which we speak; we understand why the Hebrew prophets present to us but one Object of love and worship in the heavens, and why they looked upon the worship of any other gods than the one Jehovah as adulterous and sinful.

Honour to those grand Hebrew instincts! Honour to those glorious prophetic intuitions of the children

of Abraham! Honour to those noble declarations wherewith they exalted the Divine Unity, and by which they foretold that the kingdom of God should one day be exalted over all the earth!

Is there anything impossible in the central faith of the Hebrews, that God is One, and that His name shall ultimately be acknowledged as One? Is it impossible that He who rules should make His rule Is it impossible that He who sits upon the known? throne and holds the sceptre should subdue the disowners of His name and the rebels to His authority? Is it impossible that the fact of the Divine Unity should at length enter the general mind of mankind and be acknowledged by all? It were treason to truth to suppose that this will not ultimately be the What! is every other form of truth, scientific. philosophical and political, though disowned at first, though at one time in a minority of adherents, though, like a seed beneath incumbent clods, heaving up itself with difficulty to the light, to make its way at length, and conquer the majorities and take up its sceptre and reign,—and is theological truth to be the sole exception to this general course? Surely, this cannot be. He who has the kingdom, who rules nature, who governs mankind, who speeds onward the stars of the heavens and develops the societies of men, will at length make His authority apparent to all minds, and we shall all know that His kingdom really is and was

and shall be, and that it has only to come to us, or to those who have not received it, in fact to become universal.

Assuredly, that Mind of our times, which has been disciplined by political facts and historic experience, which has been informed by science and cultured by philosophy, which has made such advances in a know-ledge of the principles of social economy, of the phenomena of natural history, of the facts and combinations of science as has distanced all past ages, will not remain stationary in theological research, will not be restricted by creed or by curse, by book or by priest, but will seek God and find Him, in His peerless unity, in His unrivalled Oneness.

The time is nearer at hand than is thought by many, when the Hebrew prophecy shall be fulfilled, and the Unity of God shall become the faith of the collected nations, when the spread of knowledge and the liberation of the intellect from the tyranny of superstition shall restore man to his native dignity as the child of God, and when he shall cease to bend his knee at any other shrine than the altar of the one and only God.

God speed this blessed time—the day when the Lord shall be the King over all the earth, when there shall be one Lord and his name one! May we aid its advent by every means in our power, but especially by the devout and worshipful service which we ourselves render to the only Hearer and Answerer of

prayer, by the love which we ourselves shew to the Most Holy and Divine One who fills the earth with His goodness and upholds the heavens by His power! Hours and days and weeks and months and years are not sufficient to contemplate and adore the idea of the Divine Unity, and to realize the perfection and glory of Him who is at once its spirit and its form. It will require an immortal life and eternities of being to realize Him as He is, and to adore Him as He ought to be adored. Yet let us give Him all that we can, although it is far below His desert. O let us love Him with all our hearts and minds and soul and strength! The Holy One—the Eternal One—how pure should we appear before Him, how solemnly should we enter His courts; what time should not be His, what day should not be devoted to His service: what fitter employment for eternity than beholding and loving and praising Him!

If we really love the one and only God, and love Him with a clear conception of His Divine Unity, the warmth of our love will convert others to a like feeling, and turn their minds in adoration to the same Object. May this holy fire inflame our own breasts, and be kindled in the bosoms of those around us! May we ourselves so devoutly worship the only Hearer and Answerer of prayer, as to lead others to worship Him in the same spirit! If individually we adore with warmth and fervour the God of the nations in

His glorious Oneness, our faith will inspire others, will extend around us, and at length become paramount, as the sun of day rises and eclipses the stars of night, and fills the heavens with the light and glory of its beams!

O God! in Thy absolute unity may we delight to see all possible perfections combined in a glory of goodness! In Thy glorious oneness may we rejoice as in the fount of all being and centre of all existence! To Thy one and undivided will may we submit our varied desires and discordant passions! One and Almighty Monarch, rule Thou over us and within us, and let us glory in Thy kingdom, and love Thy laws, and desire to make Thy empire universal!

XXXI.—THE EXALTATION OF GOD.

His peerless excellence shall be exalted above all. We arise from the conception of many gods to the idea of a Most High God, and from that to the idea of a one and only God.

Let us beware of idolatry. Let us beware of that new form of Paganism called hero-worship. A full God is worth more to the soul than all myriads of demigods. No honour for them will satisfy the spirit like the love of God. There is a Soul overflowing all other souls, and all which is heroic, sage-like and saintly, flows from that One and Infinite Spirit. The source is ever pure, although the channel is often muddy. We have to admire the inspiration more than the prophet—the heroic spirit more than the hero.

In the pre-eminent instance of Christ himself, it is not in his humanity that we should trust, much as we revere it, much as we love it, greatly as it is dear and valuable to us, many as are the beautiful lessons it gives us, large as are our gains from its teachings of capacity and demonstrations of possibility. Our trust should be in God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself; in the Divine Spirit which is the Saviour alike in Christ and in ourselves, in the Holy Spirit of God which has to become the spirit of holiness in humanity. It is that Spirit which has to be exalted in our souls. It is God who has to be in us as He was in Christ.

Let, then, all that is human be abased before that which is divine. Let our affections be directed to God's absolute love. Let our thoughts be occupied in striving to attain to His thought, our knowledge be employed in grasping the wisdom wherewith He made the worlds. Let our many varying wills be subjected to His unswerving and eternal one, and that great day will gradually arrive when He shall be exalted over all.

O our God, in Thy glorious unity may we find that crown which shall glorify us, that throne which shall be established in our midst, that sceptre which shall rule over us! In Thee may we seek all the springs of grace and joy and peace! Seeking Thee as Christ sought Thee, may we, like him, find in Thee the Father who is greater than all! Loving Thee as we ought to do, we shall behold in Thee evermore the Being alone worthy of all our love and adoration! Be Thou exalted, O our God, within our own hearts and minds, and by them in the world around us, until Thy empire shall become universal! Amen.

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